

STOP GETTING SIDE-TRACKED

Enhance Your Focus and Concentration



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INTRODUCTION

"One reason so few of us achieve what we truly want is that we never direct our focus; we never concentrate our power. Most people dabble their way through life, never deciding to master anything in particular. In fact, I believe most people fail in life simply because they major in minor things." - Anthony Robbins

Did you know that you have about 50,000 thoughts every day? Those thoughts actually create the world you live in. You have the power to create any kind of world you desire; you are in control of that world and your thoughts. It's totally up to you which thoughts you will entertain, give energy to, and expand upon every day.

Concentrating means intense mental focusing on these thoughts each day, giving them your complete attention. And this requires practice.

You've seen them-the successful business men and women, the gold medal winning athletes, the leaders of society, the teachers of the year. What is the common denominator? These people have learned how to focus their minds on the task in front of them. They don't just concentrate; they have learned how to use their attention like a laser beam, hitting the mark every time. They don't allow themselves to become distracted or confused. And they practice this intense focusing every day.

Unfortunately, most of us don't possess that kind of focus and concentration. We try, but just can't seem to hone in on a task with that kind of power. How would you describe yourself? Are you distracted, mentally confused, scatterbrained, or maybe just a daydreamer? We are too easily distracted by the events and circumstances around us. We moan that if we could just get our act together and really concentrate, we could accomplish anything. The trouble is, the more we think about really concentrating, the less we are actually able to bring it into being; it becomes terribly elusive.

The average person can concentrate to a certain degree, some of the time; but for the most part, our thoughts are scattered, with our minds racing from one thought to the next, not even in a logical progression. I call that 'mental leapfrog.' Many times, we can't even remember how we got to a particular thought; we can't follow the progression in our minds.

So what is concentration? The Merriam-Webster Dictionary describes concentration as a direction of attention to a single object. We need the ability to regulate our thoughts, to point them undeviatingly in a straight course.

What keeps you from concentrating on your many tasks? The simplest answer is that life itself can prohibit your ability to focus on a task, to the exclusion of everything else. Many people pride themselves on their ability to multitask, claiming they are highly productive every day. However, that's still a split focus. Only a part of your attention is actually on each task; you are also thinking of all the other things you must accomplish and your mind races from one thing to another, helter-skelter.

In this report, I'm going to show you how to:

- Focus your attention on specific tasks.
- Concentrate even when you don't feel like it.
- Concentrate despite distractions all around you.
- Be more confident by using your ability to concentrate.
- Improve your ability to listen and study.
- Improve your memory.

We all have the ability to focus at least part of the time. Learning to concentrate is simply another skill we can learn. And like any other skill, it takes practice to master it. Make a personal commitment to learn this skill and you will enhance all aspects of your life-relationships, business, career and finances.

"The amount of real learning that takes place is directly proportional to our ability to concentrate or focus our attention on any one thing for a period of time." - Joel & Michelle Levey

Chapter One

WHAT MAKES IT POSSIBLE TO CONCENTRATE?

"Concentration is the master key to all success. It is the fundamental law of achievement. The man who does not concentrate will be either a half success, a mediocrity or a complete failure." - Orison Swett Marden

Your brain functions at four different wavelengths. Scientists call them:

- Beta
- Alpha
- Theta
- Delta

And they measure them in CPS or Cycles per Second.

At the Beta level, your brain is fully active. You are awake, alert, and fully in the moment-fifteen to forty cycles per second. This occurs when you are busiest, all pistons firing, wide awake and energetic, fully engaged in mental activities.

The Alpha wavelength is much slower at nine to fourteen cycles per second. This is considered a creative, thoughtful level. Sitting down and relaxing after working at a task puts the brain into this level.

When your brain is at the Theta wavelength, at only four to seven cycles per second, you are in a meditative floating state just before you slip into a deep, deep sleep. How many times have you gotten a great idea or a solution to a problem just before you drifted off? Anytime you are doing small, repetitive actions, such as brushing your teeth, or shaving, your mind can slip into the theta stage. This is considered a highly creative level for your brain. Many creative types such as writers keep a pad and pencil near them at all times, to record these wonderfully creative moments.

In the Delta state, your brain is only cycling from one point, five to four times per second, indicating an unconscious deep sleep. This is probably the only time your brain is reasonably still and quiet.

So, while your brain may be in the active, Beta stage during the day, as you get ready for bed, it begins to cycle down to the relaxed, Alpha stage, then to the creative, Theta stage as you fall asleep and finally down to the restful, Delta stage, or a deep sleep.

When you begin to awaken each morning, your brain will cycle through these stages in reverse, coming from the Delta stage and a deep sleep, up to Theta, into Alpha and finally, by the time your alarm goes off, your brain is back into the Beta stage and ready to be highly active again.

Everyone needs to learn the ability to concentrate, to focus on a task, but that ability depends on a number of factors. For starters, your commitment to a project has a great influence on how well you concentrate on it. You know that a half-hearted attempt will not bring about a successful completion to that project.

If you're enthusiastic about a project, it makes it so much easier to keep your mind on the task at hand. You've probably discovered that if it's a task you enjoy, it's easy to motivate yourself to not only start a project, but also follow it through to completion. It's hard to focus on a job if you do not enjoy it. You have to want to do it, to be willing to start that project and be willing to do what it takes to finish it.

The skills that you bring to a task also influence your ability to concentrate. The more skilled you are, the easier it is to accomplish the task and the quicker you achieve results. Knowing how to do something increases your self-confidence. You may even find that your mind wanders when the task becomes automatic, rather than totally focused as you're learning the skills.

Your emotional, physical, and psychological state has a huge influence on your ability to focus and concentrate on a particular task. If you find yourself distracted because you're worried, or feeling ill or even just out of sorts, you'll find it almost impossible to concentrate. Your mind constantly wanders away in search of the solution for whatever it is that's bothering you.

Your environment also has so much to do with your ability to concentrate and see a project through to completion. Most people are highly affected by too much noise, or heat or cold, or uncomfortable surroundings; even other people can be distracting and stressful to you and your ability to focus.

We'll cover more of these external and internal distractions in the next chapter.

Four Elements of Concentration

You'll find, when it comes to concentration, there are four elements that help to define it. These are the:

- Width
- Direction
- Intensity
- Duration

The width of your attention has to do with the amount of information coming at you from all sources. That means that it can be a rather wide perspective, with a great deal of information directed at you, or simply a narrow perspective, where it's just a limited amount, trying to get your attention.

Being able to grasp a lot of information at the same time takes practice, and even more so to shift from a large amount to a small amount and back again. Learning to do this however, will help you to avoid the unimportant thoughts that everyone experiences all day every day, and really hone in on what's important, to focus your thoughts.

The second component of attention is direction. This means how well you are able to filter information and events as they come at you. There are times when it's just not possible to filter out all events changing around you. This too requires practice.

The third component, intensity, can vary from moment to moment. Concentration can go from very weak to incredibly intense, depending on the situation in which you find yourself. Again, it requires practice to go from weak attention to detail, to an intense, focused concentration.

The last component is the duration of your attention. It can go from brief to long, sustained intervals of time. Keep in mind that it's not always possible to maintain long periods of intense, focused attention. In fact, the more intense the attention, the shorter the duration you can maintain it.

The length of a person's attention span is on average between twenty and ninety minutes, depending of course, on the person's interest in the subject at hand.

As early as 1890, William James had already formed a definition of attention. He said, "Everyone knows what attention is. It is taking possession by the mind, in clear and vivid form, of one out of what seems several simultaneously possible objects of trains of thought: focalization, concentration of consciousness are its essence. It implies withdrawal from some things in order to deal effectively with others."

Since then, students, athletes, business men and women, psychologists, scientists, and researchers have used everything in their arsenals to increase their ability to focus their minds on the task at hand, whatever is relevant at that moment in time, to the exclusion of all else. Athletes, intent upon their sport, have to focus their mind and body, like a laser beam on the appropriate action, pushing everything else from their minds. Only by doing so will they win the game; no time to daydream here.

In sports, as with other endeavors, the play changes by the second and athletes must be focused on what they are doing, fully aware and ready to spring into action, change course, and win the game. Nothing else is acceptable. There is no room in the sports arena for daydreamers. Athletes call this ability to hone in with laser-like ability being 'in the zone.'

Dr. Robert Nideffer, psychologist and founder of Enhanced Performance Systems has classified the two rudimentary categories of attention as internal and

external. He describes internal attention as mentally projecting oneself into the proposed action, whatever problems might be encountered.

External attention is, of course, what is going on around oneself. An example would be a member of a team, being constantly aware of where his/her teammates are at any given moment, as well as those on the opposing team. Athletes, probably better than anyone else, learn how to focus on the moment, to the exclusion of all else.

How are we able to focus on and deal with all the information coming at us at once? Research shows that we deal with this information on two levels. One is simply automatic; we grab onto it without consciously thinking about it. This generally happens when we are performing tasks that we have learned over time and can do almost by rote.

The second level we work at is called the controlled level. This is limited by the capacity of the brain to deal with all the information available to us. If we go beyond that capacity, our performance automatically declines. It is even possible to work on both levels at the same time, though of course, the automatic level works much faster than the controlled level.

The trick is to bring oneself to a state of awareness and energy, directed towards the desired goal. Some athletes or those involved in other types of contests might find themselves over-excited to the point of distraction. They experience nausea or nervousness, which naturally distracts them from their original focus.

You and Your Memory

"People remember ninety percent of what they do, seventy-five percent of what they see and twenty percent of what they hear." - D. Ellis

The simple truth is that your learning ability has a huge impact on your quality of life. That means it can determine how you get on in your relationships, your career, your very success in this world. Everyone is constantly seeking any way they can find to improve their mental abilities.

According to scientists, the average person forgets eighty percent of what they learn within a twenty-four hour period. So, since memory is easily the most important of all the cognitive functions, it's extremely important to do whatever you can to improve your memory, concentration, and ability for logical thinking.

Not being able to concentrate and focus on a project causes many problems, both in your career and in your personal life. Sometimes, it's downright embarrassing when your mind wanders, preventing you from concentrating on a problem. You know other people are depending on you to focus long enough to come up with the solution, and you hate letting them down. Inability to concentrate can affect your school life, work life, and personal life.

Studying is so much easier when you've mastered the ability to focus on your schoolwork. Without the ability to concentrate, you can't take advantage of the social or business opportunities that are available to you. You need the ability to focus on your goals and dreams.

Some of you may remember a television game show called "Concentration." A giant game board held matching squares. Contestants would call out two squares, in the hope that they matched. Winners won prizes for remembering each matching pair. There are many games today for children based on this same format.

Visualization is an excellent memory tool. If you can imagine something in your mind, it's much easier to remember it. Memory and concentration must go hand in hand. When you concentrate, you are mentally directing your thoughts towards a particular problem or activity. Your memory makes it possible to access the information you have accumulated through experiences you've had and people you've met.

While your brain hangs on to whatever you've learned, being able to access it becomes difficult sometimes. This is where the short-term memory and long-term memory come in. When it comes to testing situations, scientists have learned that the short-term memory is of little use, is ineffective, and does not respond well to stress. In stressful situations, the long-term memory is much more reliable, with the added bonus of having an unlimited capacity.

So how do we go about trying to move information from our short-term memory to our long-term memory? This takes time, energy, and a great deal of practice. Repetition may be necessary to build our understanding of the material. And remember that whatever you learned last is what you'll remember best.

And this is where your conscious and subconscious mind comes in. Your conscious mind, or what constitutes about twelve percent of your mind, is what you use to consider your world and your needs, such as, "I must go to work, or pick up the children." Your subconscious mind, or eighty-eight percent of your mind, is for storing your memories. This would involve knowing precisely where work is, how to get there, and at what time. The subconscious mind is also responsible for your beliefs and habits you're not necessarily aware of, and how you feel about yourself.

When your conscious mind is functioning, you are able to think of as many as nine things at once. This is what makes concentration so difficult. Your subconscious is trying to multi-task, while your conscious mind is attempting to concentrate on one single thought or action.

It's important to remember that using highly focused energy to concentrate on one important event or goal can change your whole world, and bring about

anything you desire. The moment you concentrate on a goal, you begin to take steps to accomplish that goal. The more focused you become, the faster you will move towards completion of that goal.

Chapter Two

WHAT KEEPS YOU FROM CONCENTRATING?

"The key to success is to focus our conscious mind on things we desire, not things we fear." - Brian Tracy

There are many things that can keep you from being able to focus and concentrate on the matter at hand. These include, but are not limited to:

- Distractions, both internal and external
- Stress, worry and anxiety
- Illness or personal disaster
- Procrastination
- Information Overload

Distractions

External distractions happen anywhere and everywhere, and everyone is prone to them. It can be anything from too much noise around you to the temperature being uncomfortable; too hot or too cold. It may sound silly, but physical discomfort has an impact on our ability to concentrate.

Students often find that noisy neighbors in their dormitories make it very difficult to focus on their school work. That all night party down the hall makes it almost impossible to think, let alone concentrate. Sometimes, something as simple as the incessant ringing of a telephone is enough to send you running for some quiet hideaway.

If noise makes you want to run away and hide, it's time to find some quiet and solitude in order to study. If the dormitory is too noisy, try some study time in the school library. If you're pulling an all-nighter and the library is not an option, you may have to resort to ear plugs for the silence you crave.

External distractions can be uncomfortable settings or inadequate lighting. It's necessary to have conducive surroundings such as comfortable chairs, tables of the correct height for working, and good lighting. If you're trying to study in an uncomfortable setting, with poor lighting, you're more apt to develop back pain and eye strain, rather than concentrating on your studies.

So, let's say you've found the perfect setting for your studies. It's quiet and peaceful with no outside noises, the lighting is perfect, the seating is comfortable, and you're ready to begin studying. What other distractions could possibly keep you from focusing and concentrating on what's important to you?

That's when the internal distractions raise their ugly little heads. You may decide that you're hungry or tired. Or maybe you lack the motivation to stay with it; you're bored to tears with the subject, or worse, it's a subject you really have absolutely no interest in to begin with.

You could find yourself doing nothing but daydreaming, or feeling totally disorganized. Maybe you're thinking, "I really should be cleaning up around here; this place is a mess." Your job could be on your mind too; maybe you're worrying you'll lose your position and not be able to pay your bills.

Worrying about what others are thinking is a common distraction too. "What if I can't do this? What if I make mistakes? What if I'm too nervous?" All these things may be running through your head, totally distracting you from the important job of concentrating and focusing all your energy on the task.

Worse still, you may develop the nasty habit of negative thinking. That little voice in your head that tells you there's no chance of success. What ever gave you the idea that you could accomplish something of this magnitude? You begin to dwell on your every little mistake, instead of looking forward and learning to correct those mistakes. Internal and external distractions are an inevitable part of life and it becomes a matter of how you'll handle these annoyances and more importantly, how to stop them.

Sometimes, it's as easy as that. You just tell yourself to stop right there and get a grip. Force yourself to stop thinking the negative thoughts and get back to the important task at hand. This takes practice of course, but is essential for concentration. If you don't grab your attention immediately, you'll find yourself caught up in the 'mental leapfrog' once again, your thoughts going round and round and your focus is out the window. Learning to refocus your attention may take some time, but it is well worth the effort.

Stress and Anxiety

In today's world, stress and anxiety are also inevitable concentration breakers. It happens to everyone, at one point or another; and learning how to handle it can make or break your concentration.

Short-term stress such as a deadline often helps a person to really knuckle down to a task. You know you have a certain amount of time to accomplish something and focusing is both necessary and desirable in order to do so. When you reach that deadline, you can relax a while before the next one.

Long-term stress however, does not aid the concentration effort. The more stress you feel, the less able you are able to concentrate. When you become stressed, your body begins dumping chemicals into your brain to help you focus, and adrenaline into your bloodstream to keep you moving. In the beginning, this can be a good thing. It can keep you going when you need to solve a problem in the here and now. However, long-term stress starts to lessen your ability to concentrate. The brain has fired all the neurons it can, but it cannot continue to replenish the chemicals it requires long term.

The problem is the more stress you're feeling, the more the need to concentrate to relieve the causes of the stress. It's a merciless self-defeating cycle and can become damaging both mentally and physically in the long run.

What can you do to avoid this self-defeating cycle? Instead of saying over and over, "I have to finish this right now, concentrate!" tell yourself it's time for a little break. Take a walk, watch some television, take a nap, read something, or exercise. It's important at this stage to clear your mind, get a fresh perspective on things.

If you're at work and can't take advantage of these stress relievers, try something simple, right there at your desk. Push yourself away from the work, get up and stretch, take some deep breaths, close your eyes and do some relaxation exercises, anything to take your mind from the problem, even for just a few minutes.

Illness and Personal Disaster

You can't avoid these distractions forever. Everyone has to deal with illness and/or personal disaster at one point or another in their life. Simple illnesses that last only a few days make it very difficult to focus on what's important. Serious illness can actually put everything else on hold for an indefinite amount of time. Focusing on studies or work while experiencing a migraine is one thing, but trying to focus while dealing with a life-threatening illness is something else again.

Small or large personal disasters can also make the aim of concentrating on what's important extremely difficult. A breakup of your relationship can have dire consequences when it comes to being able to focus and concentrate at work or at school. Likewise, a death in the family, marriage, a new baby, changing jobs or locations all can have an impact on your ability to focus on whatever is important in your life at that moment.

Procrastination

R. D. Clyde said, *"It's amazing how long it takes to complete something we're not working on."*

Unfortunately, this happens to us all. We intend to complete a project, but end up putting it off until tomorrow, or next week, or next month - anything to avoid doing it now. There are many reasons why we procrastinate.

Sometimes it's because we don't have a distinct goal in mind. If you don't know what you're aiming for, how will you know when you've hit it? If you don't know where you're going, how will you know when you've arrived?

You might be procrastinating over a project because you don't really enjoy it, or fear you're not up to it and you won't do a good job, so you just keep putting it off. This of course, makes it very difficult to concentrate on the project. We've already talked about how trying to force yourself to concentrate results in even less focus than ever. Therefore, you find yourself in a vicious cycle. Procrastination prohibits concentration, which produces guilt, causing you to avoid the problem some more. And there you are, procrastinating yet again.

Many times, procrastination is merely resentment against doing something you don't really want to do. You know you have to do it and eventually you will do it, but in the meantime, you keep pushing it away. But it won't go away and it will just keep pushing back until you sit down and finish the task.

It's time for you to get down to the priorities and figure out exactly what you want. Set the goals, set up the plan to accomplish those goals, figure out the steps to achieve what you've set up for yourself, and then just go for it. Procrastination is usually the result of not enough planning. Get your plan firmly in your mind and procrastination will fade away.

Along the way, give yourself some motivation to keep going. Picture yourself at the end of the job, it's finished and you're proud of yourself. Give yourself a little reward when you do complete the project. The reward could be anything from a day off to read, or a short trip, depending on the size and length of the project. If you've been working on something for months, give yourself a nice weekend of rest and relaxation. Been working hard all week? Give yourself a fancy coffee and an hour all to yourself.

Are you procrastinating because the project is so big, so overwhelming, that you can't even think about it without wanting to run away or faint? Instead of avoiding the problem, and watching it grow larger and larger, try breaking the job into smaller, more easily accomplished chunks. Then do just one section at a time, keeping your mind on that one section and not thinking about the rest until you finish the part you're doing now. As you accomplish each section, pat yourself on the back, give yourself a little reward, and then get started on the next section, the next chunk of the project.

Another reason many people procrastinate is the desire to be perfect. Maybe you don't want to start a job if you can't do it perfectly, so you put it off, and put it off, until there's no more time. Now you're off the hook. You could have done a

perfect job, but there was simply not enough time. It's okay to be imperfect; we all are. We are, after all, only human, and that's okay. Don't push yourself to be something or do something that's not possible.

Information Overload

For decades, we've been all about developing more and more labor saving devices, communication devices, needing more and more information about everything under the sun. Now we've become a society that doesn't just enjoy, but desperately needs the Blackberry, the pager, the cell phone, the laptop and internet access. Through these devices, we receive information every minute, every hour, every day. We have snail mail, email, radio, television, and phone calls demanding our constant attention. We have books, magazines, reports, and articles that must be read and absorbed. Heaven forbid any information should elude us. We feel we must know everything there is to know, every minute of every day. We're terrified of being out of the loop, or in the dark about anything.

In our quest to know increasingly and because of our fear of being left out from new information, we have come to a point where it is impossible to concentrate on a project, to focus with laser-like energy. We're much too busy gathering information. When do we have enough?

David Shenk calls this "data smog" and likens it to pollution we find throughout our world. The production and distribution of information in today's world has become so much easier to do, not to mention the retrieval of said information, thanks to the internet. This unfortunately, produces an overabundance of low quality information coming at you constantly, every day, from a diverse amount of sources.

The speed at which our society changes is mind boggling to say the least. Technology changes with each passing minute; there's always new new ways to make old jobs easier or even obsolete. Scientific breakthroughs and cultural innovations happen with such rapidity that it's difficult to keep up. Every day, science fiction becomes science fact. And all of us feel we must run to keep up, keep our skills sharp, learn new skills every day, every year, constantly adapt to an ever changing society and work world.

When the distribution of more information began, it was considered a good thing, but we may have already reached our saturation point, and the flow of information towards us continues, increasing every day. It's time to limit our use of so much useless information.

Futurologist Alvin Toffler has put together a very detailed study of the acceleration of change and its psychological effects. He foresees a time of severe physical and mental disturbances, which he calls "future shock" syndrome. He likens this to the nervous breakdown people experience due to wartime trauma,

called "shell shock." The rapid changes of our modern life can, and he thinks will, produce a state of helplessness and inadequacy.

Studies have been done to show the direct correlation between constant change and physical illness. People with high life changes are more likely to develop serious illnesses.

Change can bring about one of two conditions. A person can become excited and curious about what happens next, or they can become fearful, confused, and tense. The longer these feelings remain, the more likely that fatigue will set in and the person will experience loss of control and feel highly distressed. Anyone who has experienced these feelings will tell you focus and concentration are out the window at this point. It's impossible to concentrate under these conditions.

Too long in this kind of stressful situation brings about the instinctive animal reaction—fight or flight. A person can become aggressive in his/her behavior, something that is difficult to sustain for long periods, or it can cause that person to want to run away and avoid the whole painful thing. It can also tip a person into total despair and depression, a complete numbing of their sensations, an inability to move forward.

Unfortunately, anxiety seems to be ever present in our society, as evidenced by the record use of drugs to suppress the symptoms, such as sleeplessness, irritability, constant worry, and digestive upsets. Never have so many people needed so much medication just to make it through their lives.

Maybe it's time to quiet the incessant chatter and stem the flow of useless information. Then we may better determine what's important to us and what isn't, what we need and what we can do without, what's necessary to our existence and what amounts to pollution of our mental world.

What can we do about this "data smog?" How do we clear our heads so as to focus on the problems and concentrate on solutions? For starters, set the filters on your email, to dump the truly useless junk mail. If you must check your email all day, at least limit the amount you must go through. Throw away the obvious junk mail you receive each day unless it pertains to something you really need.

Try turning off the television a few hours a day; take a break from the news on occasion. Leave your Blackberry, pager, and cell phone at home when you take a vacation. Let your mind and body rest. Focus on what's important. Remember, you cannot examine every piece of data, or every new web site added to the millions out there already. Don't let information take control of you; you must control information.

Chapter Three

LEARNING TO FOCUS: YOU CAN INCREASE YOUR ABILITY TO CONCENTRATE

"Concentrate all your thoughts upon the work at hand. The sun's rays do not burn until brought to a focus." - Alexander Graham Bell

So, you've figured out what keeps you from focusing on your project or your studies. You've located a nice, quiet place to think, study, and work; or discovered ways to control the distractions at least to a certain degree. You are taking steps to change bad habits, like procrastinating and you've even found ways to relax and reduce the stress and anxiety in your life.

Yet you still find your thoughts buzzing around like errant bees, flitting this way and that, but never lighting long enough to accomplish anything. Now what, you ask? You're still not able to focus on the task at hand, and the harder you try, the more elusive concentration becomes. You may have even found yourself staring out the window, daydreaming, while the task waits in front of you, unfinished, maybe not even begun.

Many times, the reason we aren't able to focus on the task in front of us, is that we haven't properly outlined our ultimate goals. If you don't know what you want or need, it's difficult to get started. It's like deciding to take a road trip, without ever determining where it is you wish to go. You can't start out without a direction and a desired destination. Your goals may feel almost impossible to reach, too overwhelming to wrap your brain around.

It's time to sit down and determine where you want to go, or exactly what it is you wish to accomplish. If necessary, break down the goal into smaller, more easily accomplished steps to help you get started on your journey. Helmut Schmidt tells us, "It must be born in mind that the tragedy of life doesn't lie in not reaching your goal. The tragedy lies in having no goal to reach." Without clearly delineated goals, you're simply spinning your wheels. You become a hamster in an exercise wheel, running round and round, without ever getting anywhere.

As odd as it may sound, the best way to do this is to figure out what your ultimate goal might be and work backwards. Let's say you want to eventually become a surgeon. You obviously can't just take off willy-nilly, saying you want to be a surgeon, and hope you'll eventually become one. You need a plan, a carefully laid out step-by-step plan. Working backwards, you determine that you'll need experience and years of medical training; that starts with a good college education, followed by medical school, interning, specialized training, etc.

Now that you know precisely what you want to accomplish and you have a plan, you can begin the journey towards a degree and the work you desire. It's the same with any goal you can dream of. You need a plan and a timetable. Remember, 'someday' is not a day of the week. Make a plan, determine how long it will take

you to achieve your dream and then you are ready to focus on something, not a vague 'someday,' but a firm time in your mind. Establishing a goal is great, but you must have a deadline.

Having a plan, a roadmap, if you will, helps to overcome the feeling of being overwhelmed, which is also a deterrent to concentrating. You know what you want, you know how to get it; you know every step needed to get you there. You simply have to follow the roadmap and you will arrive at your destination in the allotted period.

Okay, you've got your roadmap all laid out, your plans are ready, you know what you want and which way to go. Your project awaits your attention and still your thoughts are scattered, difficult to pin down and focus on the task at hand. Every time you sit down and try to concentrate, your thoughts start spinning round and round again. For some people, it helps to write down these dizzy moments - what got them started and where they led.

Try keeping a journal for a few weeks, to help you see what your mind is focusing on and to help you learn how to put that focus where it should be, where you want and need it to be.

We'd all like to have the mental alertness, the sharpness of a laser when it comes to our thoughts and focusing on a project or task. Most of us are not fortunate enough to possess anything like that. Scientists have discovered many people's brains are actually working less as they go about the tasks that really require more attention and a higher level of brain activity. How can that be, you ask?

Most of us haven't learned to produce the brainwave patterns that will result in a high level of concentration and focused attention. It's rare for us to be in that kind of focused mode; we're easily distracted and it takes time to teach our brains to switch into that kind of intense, attentive state necessary. There have been many great minds capable of that kind of focused attention, but most of us don't have that ability.

That doesn't mean we can't learn how to train our brains to be more focused and attentive. It just takes practice, practice, and more practice. It's a skill like any other and can be mastered in time.

Think back to a time when you were absolutely absorbed by a book, or movie, or maybe a conversation that was so interesting, you couldn't get it out of your mind. What was it about that book, movie, or conversation that had you so enraptured, you couldn't stop thinking about it? No doubt, there have been times you simply lost track of time while reading, watching a film, or talking to someone you found utterly fascinating.

You've already discovered that your attention span increases for subjects that interest you, subjects you find thrilling. But what do you do about subjects that

you have little or no interest in? It is possible that you believe you have no interest in something because you really know very little about it. Learning more might increase your attention span. Treat that subject as if it were already a favorite topic of yours; learn about it, research it. It really comes down to a psychological game; you simply trick yourself into liking something new.

When it comes to tackling a new project, it may be necessary to do some brainstorming. Simply sitting there and telling yourself to think won't work, in fact, the more you tell yourself to think, the more it sits there powerless to come up with anything of value. Take advantage of the Alpha stage, that creative, thoughtful level, when your brain is relaxed and the thoughts flow unencumbered by stress and anxiety. Many people find it helpful to keep a pen and paper handy during these times, to catch those thoughts before they disappear.

When you're in the midst of a task and unable to marshal your thoughts, try and relax, let yourself slip into that Alpha state, that state of creativity.

Buddha said, "There is nothing so disobedient as an undisciplined mind, and there is nothing so obedient as a disciplined mind." It's simply a matter of learning to discipline your mind. So it really is clearly a case of mind over matter. We must learn how to:

- Block out unwanted thoughts
- Keep our brains from becoming either overwhelmed or underwhelmed
- Lengthen our attention spans and keep our minds from wandering away
- Switch from one project to another without losing our focus

This may seem like an overwhelming process, but is essential if we are to become successful, effective, and totally in charge of our lives. Sam Horn, in his book "ConZentration," tells us "Concentration is mindfully managing our Thoughts, Interest, Moments and Emotions, and that we come to understand the best way to make the most of our time, is to make the most of this moment."

So, what do you do if while you're sitting at your desk, working away, fully focused on your project, a stray thought suddenly intrudes itself upon your mind? Exactly what do you do with an unwanted thought? It may sound silly, but you must learn to say "No!" Recognize that it is an intrusion into your mind, and consciously push it away and slam the door on it, as you would any intrusion. It may come knocking on that door again, insisting that you pay attention to it right now.

It's not essential that you deal with that intrusive thought at that particular moment, insistent as it might be. If you must deal with it, make a promise to yourself to handle that thought later, not right now when you're focused on the important project. By promising to deal with it later, rather than telling it to just go away, there is no guilt that holds you and keeps you from concentrating. You will get to it when you have the time, but not right now. For now, it's time to

refocus and regain that concentration. Paul Valery said, "Man's great misfortune is that he has no organ, no kind of eyelid or brake to mask or block a thought, or all thought."

Giving up or allowing yourself to become frustrated will accomplish nothing. Be persistent in getting your mind to remain focused on the project at hand. Learning this kind of mind management takes time, but is well worth the effort. You will become more productive and accomplish tasks in less time.

While you're working on that project, don't forget to get up once in a while and take a break. A short walk and some deep breathing exercises will help stimulate the blood circulation and oxygen to your brain. Try switching subjects now and then, to avoid burnout. A little change of pace will also keep you from becoming bored.

Advantages to True Concentration

Being able to focus and concentrate all your energies to the task at hand helps you perform them better, faster and more efficiently. If you're a student, it helps with your studying time, helping you learn more in less time. Your understanding of each subject is increased and your memory enhanced. Concentration allows you to be more creative and imaginative; you're able to visualize the end result, making your goals more reachable and achievable.

When your mind is focused and you're able to concentrate solely on that task, you'll find your mind is not clogged with useless, unwanted thoughts that keep you from your goals. You're not letting worries and stress rule your life and keep you from true mind mastery. You are in control.

Being able to focus and concentrate fully allows your natural healing abilities to develop. You are now able to control your thoughts, giving you peace of mind you've never before experienced. Your self-confidence will soar, giving you the inner strength and will power you've always desired.

You'll find that you function better in your daily life, now that you have the ability to make better decisions and carry them out. Your mind will be calm and relaxed and you'll experience total freedom from useless, unwanted thoughts and actions; you'll think what you want, when you want, and about anything you want. This will make for a much happier you, and in turn a much happier family life, not to mention a much more satisfying work life as well.

Chapter Four

YOUR PHYSICAL WELL-BEING

"I like a person who knows his own mind and sticks to it; who sees at once what, in given circumstances, is to be done, and does it." - William Hazlitt

Now it's time to tackle the physical part of mind management. Diet and exercise form a huge part of what makes your brain work, and work well and efficiently. Your overall health and well-being can have a huge impact on your ability to focus and concentrate on the task at hand. When deadlines are looming, and the pressure is rising to do well, you may find yourself ignoring what your mind and body need.

Many people push their bodies and minds beyond what is practical and safe for the sake of an approaching deadline. They keep long hours, denying their bodies rest and relaxation; they either skip meals or eat junk food. Then they wonder why they are not able to focus and finish the task.

When it comes to food, there are many ideas and theories about what you should eat and drink to help you focus and concentrate. It's all 'food for thought.' Many swear by the use of caffeine, saying it gives them the needed boost of energy. Others use energy drinks, or chocolate or sodas to help energize them when they feel fatigued. Some do not experience the boost, but instead feel jittery and uncomfortable. This can cause more concentration problems, along with the difficulties that come when the effects wear off or when too much caffeine is ingested.

Sugar has long been regarded as a real energy booster, since the brain uses glucose as a primary source of fuel. In a study of older adults, they were given either a sweet drink or carbohydrates, which metabolizes into glucose in the body. The participants actually did better in memory tests, as compared to the results after taking a placebo. Yet doctors have proved that while sugar may give the person a boost, it is short-lived, and ends up leaving them feeling more fatigued than before.

Most doctors agree that despite the advantages of glucose on the memory, whole foods, such as fruits, vegetables and grains support health in general. They stipulate that eating a healthy diet will do more for the desired level of performance than using stimulants or energy boosters. In the end, an unhealthy diet will decrease your ability to concentrate.

Another food factor to consider is eating too much or too little. Eating a heavy meal just before an important function will make you feel lethargic, since blood is being diverted from the brain to the stomach for digestion. On the other side, eating little or nothing could result in unwanted distractions such as hunger pangs or light-headedness. Eating smaller, more frequent meals actually works

best. Be sure and drink plenty of water any time you need to focus, especially when you feel sluggish.

In children, doctors have discovered that those who eat breakfast have better short-term memory than those who eat nothing. They also discovered that high-caloric breakfasts definitely impaired children's concentration. The high fat diet was found to negatively impact alertness. Once again, the more balanced diets are infinitely more desirable when it comes to positive impact on the ability to concentrate.

Supplements

Many supplements are known to enhance the brain's ability to concentrate and improve memory, but they are not substitutes for whole foods. On the health food store shelves, you'll see a variety of products all claiming to enhance your mental health.

Some health conscious folks swear by the use of potassium (found in bananas and avocados), vitamins C and E (considered to be anti-oxidants), even ginkgo biloba and garlic (felt to be a blood thinner), and Omega-3 fatty acids as well as all B vitamins.

Exercise

This will depend on a person's age, and fitness level of course. If you haven't exercised in twenty years, are over sixty, and have a smoking habit, it's a cinch you're not going to be able to run a marathon. You should probably consult with your physician first to determine your health status before starting any type of exercise regimen. However, the consensus of most doctors is that something as simple as walking each day can have a decided impact on your overall health. The release of endorphins to your brain definitely aids in concentration and focus, plus a feeling of well-being to keep you going.

So, instead of panicking just before a large project, test, or sports contest, take the advice of several experts at WebMD. They recommend that you exercise to keep your mind sharp, get a good night's sleep, eat a well-balanced meal (nothing too heavy - you don't want to get sleepy because the idea is to be wide awake and alert). You might try meditating to allow your mind to clear and feel relaxed; this will help keep you focused and ready to tackle anything. Other than those recommendations, you should try to do the necessary preparation, in advance, for whatever event awaits you. Waiting until the last moment can send you into a panic and limit your concentration.

Sleep

Your body and your brain need rest and relaxation every day. Some experts insist that power naps can improve your ability to focus and concentrate, but most of us

aren't able to take advantage of a catnap each day. Sleeping at your desk doesn't go over very well with most bosses.

In order to avoid insomnia, which can be a problem during times of stress and anxiety, try to establish a regular bedtime, even on weekends and days off. If you feel you must cut back on the number of hours that you sleep, go to bed at your regular time and simply get up earlier in the morning. Staying up late at night can have a negative effect on your entire day, making you feel as if you are moving in slow motion. Too many late nights can eventually affect your overall health, as well as your ability to concentrate.

Chapter Five

YOUR CONCENTRATION ARSENAL

"Focused mind power is one of the strongest forces on earth." - Mark Victor Hansen

You have many tools available to you these days to help you get your mind focused on whatever task you have before you. It's just a matter of learning and applying them to your advantage. These tools are:

- Meditation
- Yoga
- Hypnosis
- Self-Talk
- Concentration Exercises

Meditation

Just mentioning meditation may conjure, in your mind, the image of a large Buddha in the lotus position, chanting a mantra and humming. Scientists have done studies to test the effectiveness of meditation on the body and brain of a human being. You may be astonished to learn of their findings.

Meditation helps balance your bio-chemical centers, making it possible to control mood swings, and improve your ability to get the restful, rejuvenating sleep you need, for your body and your mind. It can reduce stress, anxiety, and depression; increase your mental stamina; improve your memory; and give you the ability to focus and multitask. Meditation stimulates the brain's neural pathways and helps you develop better, more effective mental discipline. It can even be used to stem

the ever-constant flow of intrusive information, thanks to today's technology. If you are attempting to develop a wider, more flexible attention span, a healing power for your body, and greater powers of concentration, meditation might be just what the doctor ordered.

While there are many types of meditative practices, the one thing in common is the focus on trying to quiet the overly busy mind. You may not be able to remove yourself from an uncomfortable scenario or event, but you can direct your thoughts into a more healing zone and learn how to cope with those events. Fill your mind with peace and quiet, keep that mind calm even in the roughest emotional storm, and worry and stress will get less of a foothold.

The whole point of meditation is to keep the mind in the here and now, not allowing it to go flitting off into the past, reliving old memories, or worrying about an uncertain future. These are the two largest sources of chronic stress in our society today. We can do nothing to alter the past and tomorrow is a mystery waiting to be solved. Worrying about either one is not conducive to good health, physical or mental.

Researchers have proven that meditating doesn't just make you feel calm, it can actually make you perform better; and believe it or not, it can alter the structure of your brain. They've determined that meditating increases the thickness of the cortex in the areas of the brain having to do with attention and sensory processing.

Dr. Sara Lazar, currently on staff at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, says of the human brain, "You are exercising it while you meditate and it gets bigger." Studies have shown that in the brains of accomplished musicians, athletes, and linguists, you will find this same thickening in certain areas of the cortex. Dr. Lazar points out that the growth of the cortex is not due to the growth of new neurons, but results from wider blood vessels, more supporting structures such as glia and astrocytes, and increased branching and connections. And all that happens while you simply sit and ponder the universe.

So how do you gain this calming, restful meditative state in today's world? Start by turning off everything intrusive. Turn off your pager and cell phone, unplug the fax machine, and shut down your computer. Let your answering service or machine take phone messages, so you'll have no interruptions.

Meditating twenty minutes twice a day could not only give you peace of mind and a way of facing the world calmly, but it could save your life, by reducing blockages in your blood vessels, and lowering the risk of sudden heart attack or stroke.

As for the methods or processes to meditation, there are many ways to go and you should choose what's best for you. Find a comfortable place in which to meditate, free from distractions preferably. You can add music, if you wish, or a recording of soft nature sounds. Some people start by focusing on their breath, being

conscious of it at all times, breathing in and out. This has an automatic calming effect, since most of us run around all day every day without breathing properly. The short, shallow breaths are indicative of the panic or stress we all live in so much of the time. By concentrating on your breath, you help yourself to calm down.

While you can calm down and meditate whether your eyes are open or closed, it's probably best to close your eyes at the very beginning of this experience. This will allow you to better focus on the inner peace you're seeking.

Now you're focusing on your breath, listening to soft sounds of nature, such as ocean waves or rainfall, and hopefully, no other sounds or distractions are present in this quest for calm and peace. Try adding one more element to your meditation-visualization. There are many images available for you to concentrate on. Picture some place you've visited or read about. Fix the image clearly in your mind, with your eyes closed, then insert yourself into that image. Imagine that you're there, wherever that is. Hear the sounds, feel the textures, be there. "All profitable correction comes from a calm and peaceful mind."-St. Francis de Sales

It may be difficult to do this exercise at first, but practice makes perfect. Finding those twenty minutes twice a day may even seem impossible to accomplish, so start with just a couple of minutes to begin with and work at it a little longer each day. It will get easier with practice. You may even begin to look forward to these tiny vacations from the outside world.

Here is a helpful traditional Navajo prayer that will aid in focusing your mind.

- Before me peaceful
- Behind me peaceful
- Under me peaceful
- Over me peaceful
- Around me peaceful

Scientist, writer and meditation teacher, Jon Kabat-Zinn, tells us that "Meditation is neither shutting things out nor off. It is seeing clearly and deliberately positioning yourself differently in relationship to them."

Yoga

In performing the many yoga exercises, you are slowing your brain's activity from the Beta stage to the Alpha stage to allow it to become calm, so you are able to concentrate on the poses and breathing. Yoga allows you to find that positive inner self, become calm and focused and gain some control over the chaos that surrounds you. It teaches you balance, both emotional and physical, and gives you a sense of your own strength.

A benefit of doing yoga, even for the beginner, is increased focus and concentration, not just for the exercises, but also for everything in life. You'll find you're able to withstand the storms of everyday life, as well as the occasional traumas that come your way.

It's a domino effect actually; you learn to maintain balance in your life, and how to remain calm and focused. Being focused allows you to concentrate on what you desire to learn. And when you're calm and focused, concentrating on the lessons needed, you soak it up like a sponge.

Yoga is too complex to learn in one small report, but you can find teachers and help almost anywhere. Check online and in your local yellow pages phone book for qualified teachers.

Hypnosis

You're probably picturing a little man waving a pocket watch in front of the subject, telling him he's going into a deep sleep and giving him instructions which he is then compelled to obey. This couldn't be further from the truth. The person being hypnotized is not under anyone's control; they have total free will. They are not in a deep sleep. In fact, it's not even a semi-sleep state at all. The subject is actually hyper-attentive when under hypnosis.

While in this trance-like state, the subject will react to suggestions as if they're indeed reality. If the hypnotist suggests that they are hungry or thirsty, they will actually feel hunger pangs or express a desire for water. If a suggestion is made that the subject is feeling fear, they will react with panic and even begin to sweat.

Hypnosis has been described as a trance-like state where the subject shows heightened imagination and relaxation. It's been compared to normal daydreaming, something we all do on occasions. You may have experienced the feeling of losing yourself in a sensation, a movie, or a great book; you simply lost all track of time, while you were engrossed in what you were doing or watching. This is a form of self-hypnosis and according to Milton Erikson, the premier hypnotism expert of the 20th century, people do it on a daily basis.

A lot of what we do every day is automatic; we don't really think consciously of every single thing. Your conscious mind processes information and relays it to your subconscious, which works on it while you're asleep. Hypnotism works much the same way. While under hypnosis, your conscious mind is relaxed and out of the way, and your subconscious takes over. Since the subconscious is the area of imagination and impulse, you feel more free and creative. When you're awake, your conscious mind feels the need to filter all the information that flows through and inhibits your subconscious. When you're asleep or under hypnosis, that inhibition is removed; you react automatically.

So self-hypnosis, that ability we all have to simply lose ourselves in whatever we're doing, will come in handy when you need to concentrate on the task at hand. Let yourself go, lose yourself in the task. When you've learned to quell the distractions around you and just lose yourself in the moment, you'll find the task goes easier, faster, and your mind is open to more learning and experience.

Self-Talk

"First say to yourself what you would be; and then do what you have to do." - Epictetus

Self-talk is the ongoing dialogue you have with yourself about everything from day to day occurrences to the challenges life occasionally throws at all of us. You may not even be aware of it at first; it's simply a part of you. Once you become aware of this inner dialogue, you may be surprised at how you talk to yourself. Sadly, there's no getting rid of this self-talk, it will always be with you. However, you can do something about the direction the self-talk takes; you can control whether it's positive or negative talk.

It often starts early in life, with our minds reacting to what others say to us. "You'll never amount to anything," "You can't do that," "Who do you think you are?" Comments like these have a negative impact on the rest of our lives, unless we do something to offset them. The trouble is we often pick up where that other person or persons left off, unconsciously continuing the negative dialogue, this time with ourselves.

It's time to begin a new dialogue, a positive dialogue with ourselves. The negative comments are unnecessary and damaging to our psyche. How do we do that? We can start by recognizing those negative tapes as they roll through our brains. You'll be amazed at how often those negative tapes play over and over in our brains, reinforcing the damaging, negative emotions.

As soon as a negative thought intrudes itself into your brain, stop right there and flip it around. Let's say you've made a mistake in a job you're doing. Your first impulse might be to say, "Well, that was stupid! I can never get this right. Why do I even try?" Stop yourself right there and amend that dialogue. Try saying, "Oops, that was a mistake, but I'll get it right the next time. Nobody's perfect." In other words, give yourself a break. Others may have been hard on you in the past, but it's no reason to continue being hard on yourself now.

Now use this lesson to learn to concentrate better and focus on what's important to you. Stop chastising yourself for not being more focused. You may be tempted to say, "What's wrong with you? Why can't you concentrate on this problem?" Instead, acknowledge that you may have been a little unfocused, but you're learning how to do better. Be nice to yourself. Be less critical and more uplifting with yourself. You deserve it! You most likely wouldn't put up with someone else talking to you like that. Why would you put up with it from yourself?

Keep in mind that the more negative self-talk you give yourself, the more stressed and helpless you feel. In order to empower yourself and reduce the stress, it's essential that you begin to use more positive self-talk. Build yourself up.

Don't limit yourself. You may have, on occasions, muttered, "I can't handle any more of this!" Remember, your subconscious absolutely believes whatever it hears; if you constantly feed it negativity, that's what it will believe about you. Whatever you think you can or cannot do, you're right. So, let's make it a positive experience.

Concentration Exercises

Learning the art of concentration requires practice every day. Your mind probably doesn't really want to be disciplined, and it will try to talk you out of mental exercise the same way it talks you out of physical exercise. "Stay in bed," it says, "Go ahead and daydream, why not?" "It's okay to be lazy!" Don't listen to this nonsense. You're stronger than that; don't be a slave to the whims of your mind. It's time to train that brain in the way it should go.

You begin the training with a little meditation time. Find a comfortable chair to sit in and get relaxed. Close your eyes and picture numbers or letters, one at a time. When you can see the letter or number in your head, say it. Then picture the next in the sequence, and so on, until you reach the end of the alphabet or up to about 100. This may seem overly simplified, but it's a great way to train your brain to do what you want it to do and not what it wants to do.

Another simple concentration exercise is to sit comfortably, facing a blank wall. Stare at the blank wall and count your breaths. Focus on staring at that wall and counting your breaths, and let nothing else enter your mind. If your mind starts to wander, bring it gently back to the blank wall and the breathing.

You can also pick an object in the room, focus on it, and study it carefully. Notice the size, the shape, what it's made of, everything about it. Now, close your eyes and try to imagine the object in your mind's eye. If your mind wanders, open your eyes and focus on the object again, then repeat the process.

These exercises can be done each day for a few minutes, until you are able to control your concentration and successfully focus on whatever you've chosen. Show your brain who's boss!

Chapter Six

HOW TO APPLY NLP

"The mind precedes all things, the mind dominates all things, the mind creates all things." - Buddha

According to Wikipedia, NLP, or Neuro-Linguistic Programming is a set of techniques, skills and beliefs that adherents use primarily as an approach to personal development. A student of mathematics, named Richard Bandler; his professor of linguistics, John Grinder; and a social scientist named Gregory Bateson developed the ideas of NLP in the mid 1970s. The three came up with a set of models and principles to explore the mind (neuro), language patterns (linguistics) and human perception, and cognitive processes into systemic patterns (programming).

NLP is based on language patterns and body language, and focuses on areas such as how subjective reality forms our beliefs, how we look at the world around us, and how our behavior can change how we believe and how we deal with traumas in our lives. What it boils down to is that NLP helps people change by teaching them to program their brains.

The developers used the unconscious mind, along with the methods that Freud used to interpret dreams, and added hypnotherapy as expounded by Milton Erikson. Any of us can use the communication and persuasion skills, and add self-hypnosis to motivate us to change our behavior and reactions.

While some are studying and trying to apply NLP to various fields, others in the scientific community have criticized the practice as unproven or pseudoscientific. There have even been disputes among the developers and advocates concerning what it is and what it is not.

The proponents do agree that those who learn NLP seem to be more effective at work and better at relationships. They insist that NLP provides the means and opportunity to develop a rich connection and bring about healing, change, and growth.

The tools and applications made available to everyone in NLP can be used in education, business, management and training programs. You may even have used the principles involved without realizing that it came from the NLP programs.

There are seminars available now to teach advanced communication skills for those in counseling, therapy, as well as other professionals in the health care community. Any professionals who work in marketing, sales, both online and offline, would benefit from this training. Those involved in business, management, and consulting, or those in the law profession, are in need of good

communication skills. It would be an essential skill for those in the education field.

Learning good communication skills and using them positively and effectively can affect your self-confidence. They can have a definite impact on your social skills and leadership abilities, as well as your listening, managing, parenting, and public speaking skills. Being able to communicate effectively can mean the difference between getting good grades or bad, getting that great job or losing out, functioning socially or being a wallflower.

Possession of these necessary skills can raise your self-esteem and even help you get rid of certain phobias that may have been plaguing you, such as fear of flying or fear of public speaking. These fears can cause dangerous levels of stress and anxiety, so learning how to function in today's society can alleviate much of your stress and reduce anxious emotions. Focus and concentration depend on you feeling strong about yourself. As with babies and small children, adults learn better and faster when they are feeling confident and comfortable.

It's important to develop meta-cognition, that is simply knowing about knowing, having a skill, whatever that happens to be, and being willing to teach others how you do it and how they can do it too.

Presuppositions

Presuppositions are the beliefs people use when applying NLP. These help them create the changes necessary to affect their world, their relationships, and themselves. There are adherents to these presuppositions as well as critics, so it's up to each individual to decide whether these beliefs will work for them or not.

1. The first presupposition is that communication is much more than what you are saying. Body language plays a huge part in the overall communication in your every day life, both personal and professional. It's a good idea to study this language and make sure you know precisely what you're telling others.
2. No one is wrong or broken. They are accomplishing what they're accomplishing; whether it's good or bad is beside the point.
3. We all have the resources we need to change what we need to change. The problem is that they're not always at our fingertips at the right time. It's up to us to find those resources and make the best possible use of them as we can.
4. Despite how people behave, their intentions are positive. It doesn't always appear that way and their methods are not always the best choices.
5. Every behavior, whether it's good or bad, is useful in one way or another, in some context or other.

6. The meaning of a particular communication, in your day to day life, is the response you get.

7. If you aren't getting the response you wanted, perhaps you should try something else, or try doing it a different way. The definition of insanity is doing the same thing in the same way, but expecting a different outcome or response.

8. There is no such thing as failure; there is only feedback. Just because the outcome wasn't your intention doesn't mean you failed, as long as you learn from that mistake and apply it to your next attempt.

9. Having any choice is better than having no choice at all. You may think your choices are limited, but at least you do have the luxury of making a choice. It's up to you whether you make a good one or a bad one.

10. In whatever system you use, the element with the most flexibility exerts the most influence. Try not to be too rigid in your beliefs; be as flexible as you can and you will exert more influence.

11. The map is not the territory. This means that while we cannot contain every single bit of information that we acquire in life, we can create a map of our territory, to use as a referral in our quest for information about our world.

12. If someone can do something, anyone can learn it. This particular presupposition has many critics who feel that it's over simplistic, that it's not always possible. It is possible that this presupposition was included to give people more hope; that they can do anything they put their minds to. A person who feels anything is possible is more likely to change their life for the better. They feel no limitations.

13. You cannot fail to communicate. It may not be a positive communication every time, but you are communicating. The trick is to learn how to make that communication positive and affirming, even uplifting. This will change your life and the lives of those around you too.

As mentioned before, NLP has its proponents and its critics, but it falls to each individual to determine whether or not they are useful. NLP was developed to help each person become the best they can be, to enhance relationships, both personal and professional.

CONCLUSION

"Life does not consist mainly or even largely of facts and happenings. It consists mainly of the storm of thoughts that are forever blowing through ones mind."- Mark Twain

Mark Twain is right about the storm of thoughts that are forever blowing through ones' mind. This makes focus and concentration a problem sometimes. It's a matter of picking the priority to focus on and thinking about the rest later.

We can learn to focus on the priorities with a little motivation. The advantages of learning to focus are many and can literally change your life. The trick is learning to concentrate on the here and now, and pushing aside the distractions that constantly assault your senses.

Whether you use meditation, hypnosis, self-talk or special exercises, you can learn to motivate yourself to concentrate. You can learn to accomplish tasks in less time, thereby increasing your productivity. You will gain peace of mind and watch your self-confidence soar. Concentration will improve your quality of life.

So even if it is reluctant, resistant or downright resentful, you can stop the excuses and get your brain to pay attention to you.

"Great men accomplish significant deeds through an enduring effort in a consistent direction. When you wish to achieve an important aim, direct your thoughts along a steady, uninterrupted course." - Proverb 57 from I Ching

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