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2026
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An Introduction to NLP for Alexander Teachers Part 2 – The Structure of Thinking



BY DAVID OWEN

I started my last article “An Introduction to NLP for Alexander Teachers Part 1 – Language Patterns” *ExChange* | December 2025, with Lao Tsu’s opening to his Tao Te Ching:¹

“The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao”

It referred to both NLP™ (Neuro-Linguistic Programming™) and the Alexander Technique, pointing out that experiencing both NLP and AT is essential to know what they are. In the last article we looked mostly at the linguistic aspects of NLP: the words we have *told* ourselves and others, and been told by others about experience. This time, we mostly look at the unspoken - *untold* aspects of our thinking and experience... Perhaps not the eternal, but at least the *ancient* structure of thinking, which predates language. In NLP circles, we call these aspects *Submodalities* as they are distinctions within the five representation systems or thinking channels or thinking *Modalities*, based on our five senses.

However, we will start with a roundup of the fundamental principles or theoretical assumptions of NLP, known as the *Presuppositions of NLP*. Then we will look at submodalities. We will also look at various dimensional concepts, which partly come from submodalities and have also been found to be useful for many people.

Presuppositions of NLP

As we discussed in Part 1, a presupposition is something that is pre-supposed: assumed or treated as if it is true. This can be unconscious as an unexamined part of someone’s model of the world, deliberate and disingenuous, or deliberate and offered as a proposition. Richard Bandler and John Grinder, the co-creators of NLP, posed a series of presuppositions of the last sort. They are generally unprovable, though if you act as if they are true, they seem to be useful or self-fulfilling. Some of the main presuppositions are:²

How our minds work

- Experience has a structure. i.e.
- We perceive, remember and imagine according to our five senses.
- So-called 6th senses are expressed in terms of these five: e.g. Clairvoyance – seeing clearly.

- Language as a sixth processing channel still represents the five senses.
- We each experience our own Model of the world (See previous article) and:
- The map is not the territory (originally from Alfred Korzybski.) Therefore, we do not perceive the actual world. (This is provable in physics and biology.)

Understanding and communicating with other people

- The positive worth of an individual is held constant; while the value and appropriateness of their internal and/or external behaviour is questioned. (See Logical levels.)
- There is a positive intention motivating every behaviour; and a context in which every behaviour has value. Therefore:
- People are always making the best choices that are available to them at the time.
- We experience other people as part of our own incomplete and inaccurate model of the world, and in communicating with them, we are experiencing and communicating with their own model. Therefore *their* map or model of the world is actually the territory we have to deal with.
- The meaning of your communication – to the receiver – is indicated by the response you get from them.
- You cannot not communicate. i.e. By withholding communication, you are still communicating. Body language and actions also communicate.

Learning, choice and flexibility

- Memory and imagination share many of the same neurological pathways. Therefore, if you vividly imagine being able to do something, you are likely to be better able to do it.
- Human beings mostly share the same neurology. Therefore, in thinking terms, what is possible for one person is probably possible for another.
- In the context of learning: there is no failure, only feedback. Feedback takes you closer to success.
- If you always do what you have always done, you will always get what you have always got. So if what you are doing is not working, do something different!

(Or as I say to my pupils, “In order to change, you need to be able to refrain from doing what you would have ordinarily done.” This is one of my definitions of inhibition.)

- Choice is always better than no choice:

No choice means you are dead or in a coma.

One choice means you are stuck.

Two means you are in a dilemma.

Three possibilities is the minimum for choice.

(Note that F.M. Alexander had three choices available once having inhibited his immediate intent to recite: do nothing, do something else, or actually go ahead and recite after all.)

- The individual with the greatest flexibility of thought and behaviour will generally control the outcome of an interaction (after Ashby's Law of Requisite Variety. ³⁾ (Note that unfortunately, this can be trumped by whoever is willing to be most unreasonable, which in turn can be trumped by whoever is willing to be most unreasonably reasonable – a high level of flexibility. See 'Win-Win or No-Deal'.)
- It is easier to change your own behaviour than other people's.
(Though in my experience, other people's behaviour often changes as a result of changing our own behaviour, or even as a result of changing our own thinking!)

Submodalities

Richard Bandler seems to have been the first person to deduce that these differences in how we think within each of our five senses, make such a significant difference to us, our thinking, our emotions and our actions. He claims he was working with psychiatrists who wanted to find out how phobias work. He, however, wanted to find out how people had gotten over them!

He advertised in the paper, offering a reward for people who had formerly had a raging phobia, but had somehow gotten over it. He asked his respondents how they had gotten over the phobia, and almost all of them, while stretching out their left palm, as if pushing something away, said something like:

"I looked at myself and laughed, as I saw how ridiculous it was!"

So Bandler would ask them what they were doing with their left hand and they would say:



“Well this probably sounds stupid, but I was pushing the picture of the memory away.”

As you may recognise from my first article “Using NLP and Positive Reinforcement to Teach the Alexander Technique” ExChange | May 2025, this indicated that the respondents disassociated and therefore disconnected themselves from the emotions of the phobia. If you have not read that article yet, try the following experiment:

Remember a time when you felt wonderful.

Remember it as if you are back in the memory, seeing what you saw at the time.

Notice that this brings back a lot of the good feelings of this time.

Now ‘step out’ of the memory and remember it as if you are looking at yourself from some distance outside at that time.

Notice how the feelings associated with that memory are now a lot less.

It is the same visual memory, but seen differently in your mind’s eye. By changing how we see, hear and feel things internally, we can change our mood and increase mental functionality.

We are usually unaware of these patterns. Examples are whether we imagine something close or far away, clearly or vaguely, darkly or brightly or normal brightness etc. Some differences are distinct or ‘Digital’ such as remembered or created, whether you are associated, disassociated, or associated as someone else (first, third and second position.) Others are variable or ‘Analogue’ such as distance, brightness, etc. Some are a mixture such as normal volume being fixed, but louder or quieter being variable. There are submodalities in each of the representation systems.

Visual

- Remembered or imagined (created.)
- First, second or third position.
- Still or if moving, slower, normal or fast speed.
- Colour or black and white, colour effects such as sepia, or variations from pastel through to overly vivid colour.
- Location of image: distance and angle left, centre or right – down, level or up. Also above, below, left or right, or somewhere behind – all being out of normal vision.
- Size of image: normal, larger or smaller.

- Brightness: normal, duller or brighter.
- Clarity: normal, soft or fuzzy, extra sharp.
- Opaque or varying degrees of transparency.
- Panoramic or constrained, either with a fuzzy or sharp edge, or even some sort of frame.
- If not panoramic, what is the outline shape of the image? Oblong, polygon, circular or oval?

Auditory

- Remembered or created.
- First, second or third position.
- Normal, quieter or louder volume.
- Normal, fast or slow speed.
- Soft, normal or sharp clarity.
- Pitch: normal, lower or higher.
- Tone: soft or mellow, natural or neutral, sharp or harsh – especially with voice tone.
- Location of sound: distance and angle left, centre or right, down, level or up, somewhere behind, or even inside one's head– and if so, where?

Kinaesthetic

- Physical, as distinct from emotional sensations
- Associated or disassociated. I.e. Do you sense it as if in someone else or in yourself as you look at yourself from a distance?
- Location in or on your body - internal or surface sensation.
- Intensity.
- Movement, especially for emotional sensations: Rotating, oscillating, travelling through your body, looping back to the start.
- Remembered sensation, imagined sensation, imagining what an object or person would feel like to touch.

- Quality of emotional sensation: Hot, warm, cold, pressure, suction/emptiness, roughness, smoothness, sharpness, ache, nausea, calmness etc.

Olfactory & Gustatory

- Remembered or created.
- Intensity, duration.
- Perceived location of aroma.
- N. B. The different tastes or smells are the content of the senses, rather than submodalities.

Combination Submodalities

These are where all of the senses change together, though sensations, including emotions, plus taste and smell tend to actually disappear when we are disassociated:

- Remembered or created.
- First, second, or third positions.

Impact of Submodalities

The more realistic a memory or imagined event is, the more real it seems to be. Increasing the distance and reducing the intensity of sound and image, tends to reduce the feelings associated with the subject. Conversely, close, and clear images and loud sounds increase our response.

Our emotional response will depend on context. Unwanted expected events, vivid, large and close or 'in your face' and slightly to the right for a right-handed person, will be distressing and make you want to hold back! The same image at a comfortable distance looking a bit vague, allows you to notice possible dangers and still be resourceful and work out ways to deal with the possibility or avoid it.

Likewise, living in regrets, where someone is associated into a regrettable memory, disables and disempowers the person. Whereas, stepping out of the regrets and either pushing them away to the left, or stepping back from them far enough to get a sense of perspective, helps a person to see that the event is over, be able to learn from experience and imagine how they would have dealt with it or avoided it, if they had possessed the wisdom and resourcefulness they do now, and therefore mentally prepare themselves to deal far better, with any similar situation that might arise in the future.

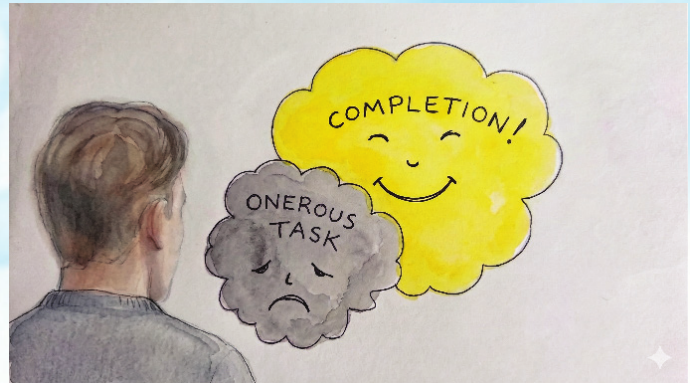
Impact Examples

Motivation

To motivate yourself:

Boldly imagining how good you are going to feel having completed an onerous task.

Place the image of feeling good, just beyond completing the task, and just beyond your reach on your future side!



It makes you want to get moving and complete the task to get to the satisfaction.

Language Submodalities

Here we need to distinguish between the linguistic structure of language as discussed in the Meta and Milton Models – and the auditory or tonal distinctions, which often affect us more deeply. They affect us differently when we hear someone else, compared to our own self-talk. The quality of our self-talk then influences how we talk to others.

Tonal qualities to be aware of are:

- Soft or mellow, neutral, or sharp or harsh.
- Volume and volume variation and emphasis.
- Pitch and pitch variation or intonation.
- Pace or speed and speed variations for emphasis.

In my own mind, I aim to have positive tone, mostly just calm, though a lilting tone of curiosity helps to make me more resourceful. Enthusiasm and excitement tend to come naturally. However, if I catch myself worrying or being grumpy, I can raise the note of my internal voice as if I am questioning “Whats this about?” and then lower the note, as if I am curious. This usually gets me out of being stuck and opens my mind to greater possibilities.

The location of your thinking voice makes a difference. One trick with a critical self-voice is to imagine that it hops out of your head onto your shoulder, then down onto your hand in front of you as if you were inviting a bird to land on it, and then give it a comical voice like Donald Duck or Tweety



Bird from the cartoons. Notice if you can still feel inferior or unresourceful when it sounds that way, or not.

Notice if a critical self-voice is similar to a critical person you have known. Again have it relocate on your hand in front of you, and recognise it for what it is – part of your own neurology trying to be helpful, though accidentally making you feel unresourceful in the process. Negotiate with it and ask what voice it could use to point out potential problems, while keeping you resourceful.

On a different *note*, I like to keep a pleasant tune in my head. However, if you have an unwanted song or tune stuck in your mind, find one that you prefer that inspires, motivates, or that soothes you instead. Stick with the new one for a while and the old one will tend to go away. If it comes back, just repeat the process, or maybe find an even better tune or song. It seems as if our brains think we want more of what we pay most attention to. By disliking a song or melody, we are paying a lot of attention to it, and our brains do not distinguish this from not liking it. We need to substitute with something that grabs our attention or makes us feel good. The same goes for unpleasant thoughts, though these are sometimes wanting our attention to resolve something.

When teaching, I go into, and have my voice tone match the state that I want in my pupil: calm and gentle if I want them to relax, calm and reassuring if I want them to trust their natural coordination, strong and firm if I want them to have strong direction etc.

Dimensional

1st, 2nd, & 3rd Positions

First Position

This is being associated, thinking from your own perspective, either

Remembered

In the moment

Hypothetically, e.g. imagining yourself in a story

In the future. We call this *Future or Pseudo orientation in time*. (See Timelines.)

In the moment is being present. We need to be fully embodied to savour the richness of life— both the wonderful and the not so wonderful. In the Jewish Passover meal, one eats the bitter fruits with the sweet— and appreciates the sweet all the better for it!

Third Position

This is disassociation, or looking at yourself and your situation from outside, either in the past, the future or in the present. As James Joyce wrote in *Dubliners* (1917 pp. 133-4)4:

“Mr. James Duffy... lived at a little distance from his body...”

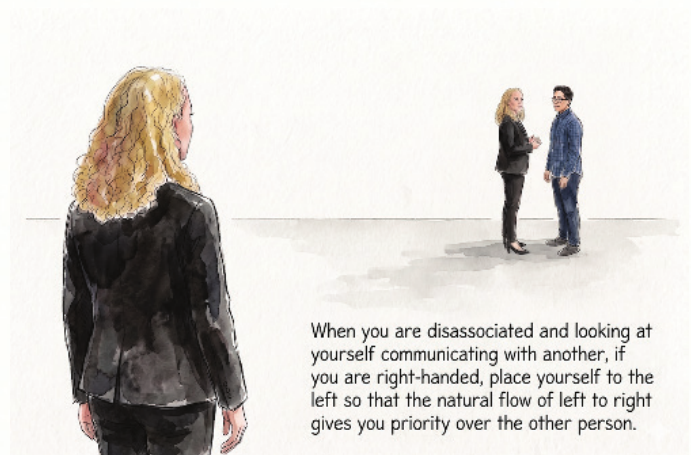
Mr Duffy in the story was an unemotional bureaucrat. Disassociation, even in the present, is an efficient way of not feeling emotions. By distancing yourself from bad memories or unwanted future possibilities, you calm your brain so that it is more resourceful. You can see what you might have done better in the past, so you can deal with or avoid anything similar in the future, or even see how to deal with or avoid fresh problems in the future.

To assess situations, you can disassociate horizontally, seeing yourself to the left of anyone else (if you are right handed) to see the personal dynamics.

If there are more than two people, you can ‘rise above’ to get a ‘birds-eye view’ of the situation in your mind’s eye, to see the organisational dynamics. About thirty degrees from horizontal gives you a good mix of personal and organisational dynamics.

Many people who have been through trauma, or have chosen to do things that others do not like to do, will have disassociated in order to avoid unpleasant emotions or, in the case of Mr Duffy, to avoid empathy. In extremes, disassociation manifests as schizophrenia.

Disassociation is not the way to enjoy life...
Remember to re-associate once it is appropriate.



When you are disassociated and looking at yourself communicating with another, if you are right-handed, place yourself to the left so that the natural flow of left to right gives you priority over the other person.



This is what a group of people looks like from a 30-degree elevated angle.
It allows you to see both one-to-one and group dynamics.

Second Position

Second position is where you imagine what it is like being someone else. We are familiar with the saying “Put yourself in their shoes,” though most of us bring our own preconceptions with us when we try to do this. People often say “If I were in your place I would.....” and we say something that is obvious to us, but may not be either obvious, possible, or appropriate for them.

Second Position Exercise

This technique helps us leave behind our own point of view and take on, to the greatest possible extent, what it may be like for another person. On your own, or as an exercise with others guiding you, mark out three positions or set out chairs and move yourself to the different positions.

Set out three positions 2 to 3 metres or 6 to 10 feet apart:

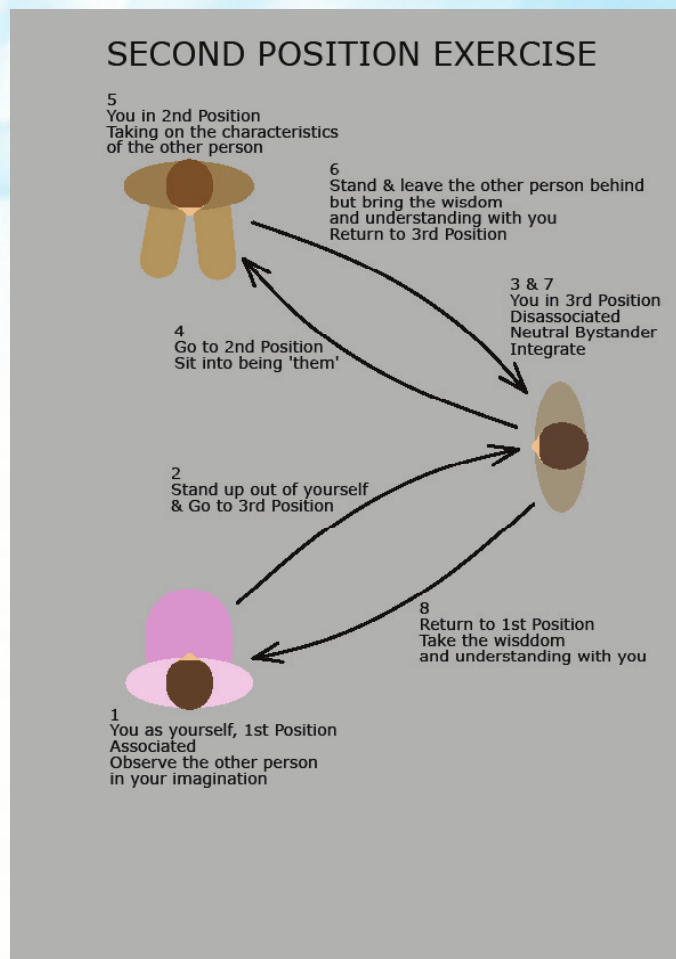
Sit in your own position, imagine the other person sitting opposite.

Notice their body language, the way they would sit, their movements.

Notice their usual clothing and acknowledge their age and gender.

Notice their head movements and facial expressions—

And notice how they speak, their word choices, sentence construction, voice tone, volume, intonation, rhythm and accentuation.



Stand up out of your chair as if you are leaving your identity behind...
As if you are stepping out of an overall or wetsuit.

Move over as if you are an independent, neutral observer, to the Third position place. (On the right for most right handed people.)

From here, as this neutral observer, look back in your imagination to your own chair, as if you were still there—

And then look over to the other (2nd) person's place, imagining them there. Again:

Notice their body language, etc,

Their clothing, age and gender —

Their head movements and facial expressions –

And how they speak, word choices, sentence construction –

Voice tone, volume, intonation, rhythm and accentuation.

Now having taken that in as an independent observer –

Move over to the other person's chair –

And as you sit, imagine you are sitting into being them, taking on their personality and identity.

Imagine and notice what it is like:

To have their body and body language, sit the way they sit, feel their movements–

Imagine wearing their clothing and being their age and gender.

Take on their head movements and facial expressions,

And think with their voice and their way of speaking.

Now imagine looking at the world from their eyes, having their observations and opinions.

Look back at your (imagined) self (1st person) from their eyes.

What do you (2nd person) make of that person (1st person) you are looking at?

What would they (1st person) need to do, how would they need to act,

What would they need to say, how, when and where –

For you (2nd person) to sense that that person over there (1st person)

Wants the very best possible Win-Win situation for you, themselves, and anyone else?

Though without compromise– It's got to be *'Win-Win or No Deal!'*

And– If that other (1st person) wanted to get a point across to you, how could they do it without insisting that you (2nd person) agree with them or even have to acknowledge their point?

How could they communicate so that you each get where each other is coming from and can work toward a mutual understanding?

And finally– Is there any particular message or advice you (2nd person) would want to give to that other (1st person) over there, to make things better between you?

Having integrated all the wisdom and understanding from all this,

Quickly and decisively, stand up out of being the other (2nd) person –

Deliberately leaving all the sensations, emotions and sense of identity behind –

Again as if you are standing out of a wetsuit...

And bringing just the learnings, intuitions, wisdom and understanding with you,

Move back to the Third position.

Here you can further integrate as you look back at the second person and then at your imagined first person self,

Then go back to your own seat, and sit back into being fully yourself again, yet having brought all the wisdom and understanding with you.

‘Win-Win or No Deal’

This is the most powerful of four ways of interacting:

Win-Win or No Deal – You are going for the best possible outcome for everyone, but will not compromise your or anyone else’s position. You are willing to walk away from any unfair or unworkable situations.

Lose-Lose – “If I can’t win, then no one else can!” They will sabotage even themselves to prevent anyone getting more than them. This undermines anyone practising Win-Lose.

Win-Lose – The usual zero sum game, based on limited, non shareable resources. “I insist on winning and therefore you lose.” They will exploit anyone practising *ordinary* Win-Win.

Ordinary Win-Win – You want everyone to have the best outcome, but are vulnerable to anyone not playing by your rules. A Win-Lose person will exploit you and a Lose-Lose person will sabotage you. Both will present themselves to you as being Win-Win to take advantage of you.

Back to Second Position

You can do this with regard to a friend, family member or partner (in life or work) or especially to understand someone you are having difficulties with. You can also use it to study a character if you are an actor.

With some people, it can be uncomfortable taking on their persona and values. (See Logical Levels.) In this case, you might want to be very brief and concise... Get just the information you need and then step out cleanly. There is a theory that all so-called good and bad behaviours are latent within all of us. Therefore we can often feel that aspect of us who could be similar to that person! Second Position may help us use our judgement, yet avoid being judgemental. Or as the saying goes “There, but for the grace of God/fortune go I.”

There are people, who when you imagine yourself as them, you realise that their values are so far from yours, or their misunderstanding of you is so extreme, that you know that you need to distance yourself or protect yourself from them. I once put myself in the place of a business partner who was sabotaging whatever I did for the company. As him, I could not see beyond his own concept of me, and that however hard I worked, he reinterpreted it as me being “money grabbing and wanting to take over the company.” These were the words that came into my head as him. I knew I had to leave to prevent him doing further damage to the other partners. The ‘Win-Win or No Deal’ was that I knew that I would be fine on my own and that he along with the other two partners would be fine without me—the company would not be sabotaged because of me.

Sometimes you will get an understanding of someone you were at odds with and be able to relate much better with them. I surprised both my mother and myself, by being able to see how her point of view – the opposite of mine – was perfectly reasonable from having had her background. We found deep rapport and I then discovered that she understood my point of view perfectly, though she thought I needed to be less idealistic, more practical and toughen up a bit.

With practice, you will start to automatically put yourself more accurately in other people’s places and understand where they are coming from. You may even find that it is as if you are listening to yourself from their ears ahead of time, and feeling how well your meaning comes across and hearing yourself updating what you want to say until it comes across in the way that you want – and only then find yourself saying what you wanted, in the most appropriate way.

Logical Levels

One of the presuppositions of NLP, quoted earlier, is:

The positive worth of an individual is held constant; while the value and appropriateness of their internal and/or external behaviour is questioned.²

Robert Dilts, one of the early students and developers of NLP, came up with a way of differentiating aspects of a person based on a system proposed by Bertrand Russell.

We often judge a person by their behaviour or beliefs, not taking into account the many other aspects that make them who they are. There are different breakdowns of these ‘levels’ and my favourite version is the following, though rather than being a list, it is more like a stack or the floors of a building. Each is built on the one below, though none is more important than any other.

Logical Levels

Connectedness
Identity
Values
Beliefs
Behaviour
Capability
Environment

I will describe them, as it were, from the ground up:

Environment

Starting at the base, someone's environment will strongly shape how they are. Deprivation will exclude many possibilities, though possibly encourage resourcefulness. Exceptions occur: Richard Bandler claims he learned keyboard by remembering the notes on the school piano and painting them on a piece of wood and practising on that. He became a band leader and session musician for Hendrix and the Moody Blues.

On the other hand from his parents' resource rich environment, Mozart played piano and violin and was composing by age five. A deprived environment may encourage crime or compassion. Or a very wealthy environment might encourage fear of loss and therefore selfishness, or gratitude and generosity.

Both past and present environments make a difference to a person. The saying goes, "If you want to fly with the eagles, stop swimming with the ducks." The company you keep is likely to determine what you are likely to do.



Capability

Often, though not always, capability can be shaped by environment, as seen in the examples above. We sometimes say, "If I were in their shoes, I would do so and so." Not realising that we have the ability to do this specific thing, and they do not.

Capability is a product of latent ability as well as learning and learned skills. One should not judge someone's value as a person for a lack of either, but one should use one's critical judgement if you consider relying on such a person for a particular result.

I know someone with neurological problems whose abilities are very limited, yet he is a very charming, inspiring young man.

Behaviour

Another person's behaviour is usually what impacts us most. Though we often judge a person by their behaviour, it will be shaped by their environment, capabilities, beliefs and values, and possibly more. In the film *I Swear*, about Tourette Syndrome sufferer John Davidson, despite his often objectionable behaviour, someone says of him "He wouldn't hurt a fly!" One could class Tourette's as being part of a person's inner environment.

We might take a person's behaviour towards us as a judgement by them on ourselves. However, when we consider all their other aspects, we often realise that it is more to do with themselves.

Beliefs

Beliefs and values used to be placed together. They influence each other, but are quite separate. Beliefs are about how one perceives the world. Consciously and unconsciously, they make up one's model of the world. They obviously influence behaviour, though behaviour can contradict someone's beliefs... A person may believe that exercise is good for them, and yet they do not exercise, perhaps because they value comfort above health.

Values

These are what truly drive us. Valuing comfort above health means the person does not exercise much. A person may believe in generosity, yet they unconsciously highly value wealth, and are not very generous.

These are our core principles. I used to have strong religious beliefs, though my values that many would ascribe to my former faith, both preceded it and persisted after. To me a value is beyond a belief.

Identity

This is perhaps the least tangible category. People have travelled the world trying to find out who they are, or have meditated, or sought teachers.

Some will claim paradoxically that they are their true self when they are in 'The Zone' or its equivalent. However, they will often say that they are no longer aware of themselves, but are part of what they are involved in at the time.

We often define ourselves by an occupation or an achievement, and I believe these are relevant. However, I sense that who we sense we are is made up from all the Logical Level aspects, just as each aspect is influenced by all the others. However, I also think our identity has a lot to do with our principles and values, whether or not we are growing as a person, and how we relate to our world and other people. This last aspect we could call 'Connectedness'. I believe that being associated

and present, as well as being connected with others and nature, and wanting justice and fairness for all, gives us the strongest sense of identity.

Connectedness

The concept of 'Spiritual' was added later by some, though others claimed there was no spiritual realm, but that we behaved spiritually by how we treated the world and others. The term 'Connectedness' embraces both concepts: One connects with Spirit by respecting others, or one respects others and is thus connected.

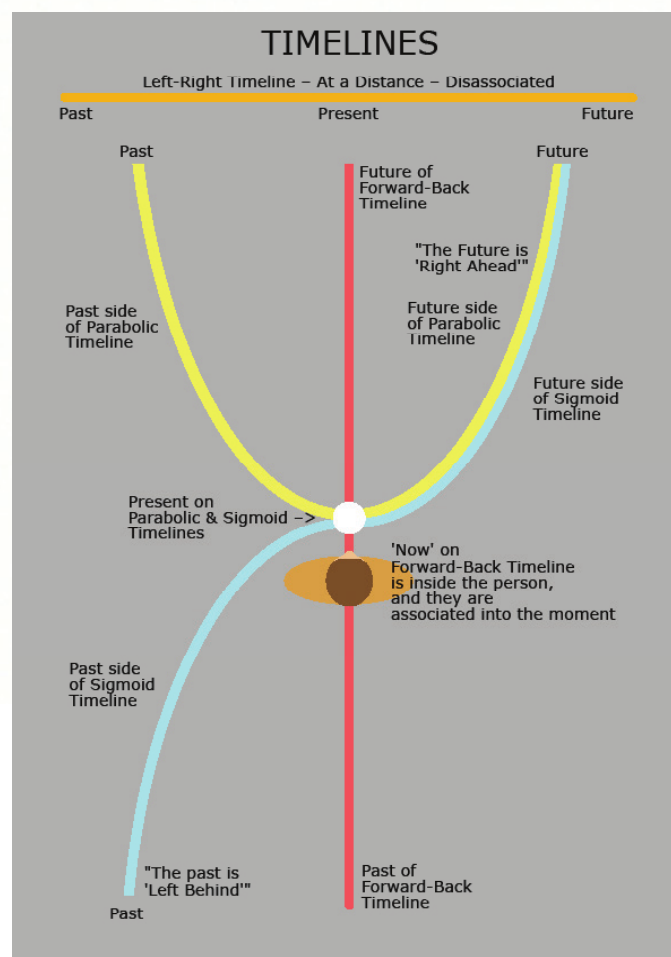
This is not *whether* we are connected, but how and to what extent, influenced by beliefs, values, environment etc. It is also how we connect back to our own and other people's environments, thereby metaphorically 'closing the loop'.

Timelines & Perspectives

Spatial Concepts of Time

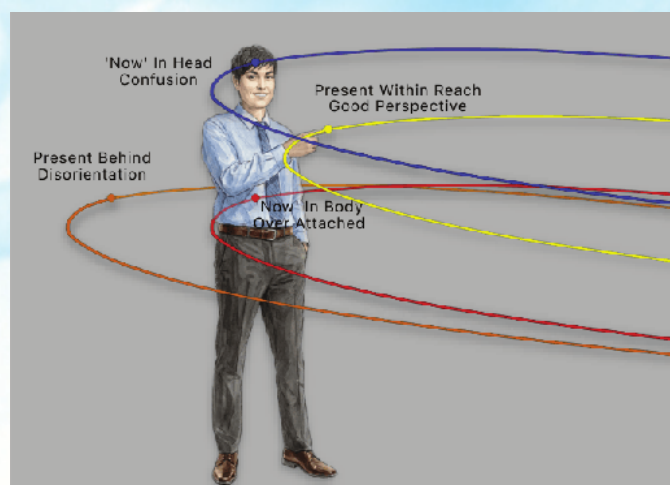
Most people seem to be aware of conceiving of time as being spatial. The most usual concept is that the past is behind us and the future is ahead, as if we are on a journey. In language we say "the far future", and "the distant past." We also say that "the future is *right* ahead" and "the past is *left* behind." This signifies a sigmoid timeline (see later) and as we saw with the eye access cues in the last article, this seems to linguistically acknowledge how we neurologically treat time spatially. Note that for many left handed people, the handedness is reversed.

The concept of the future being ahead of us is, however, not universal. In Eastern cultures, people often think of the past as being below them, and the future as being above, as if they are aspiring to greater heights. In either of these cases, we perceive time as being spread along a usually straight line.



Left-Right Linear Timeline

When it comes to thinking of time more consciously, many of us think of time as if it is on a straight line at some distance in front of us, going from left to right, past to future. This incorporates the advantage of disassociation so that we can look at the past, present, or future calmly and unemotionally, and it also gives us an easy perspective to differentiate between different times and events.



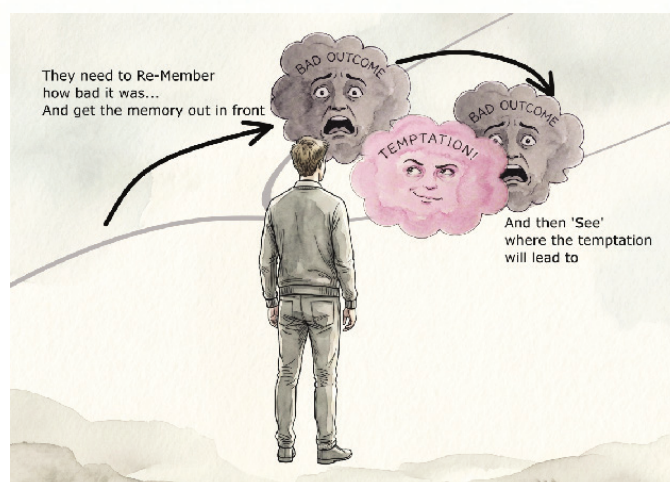
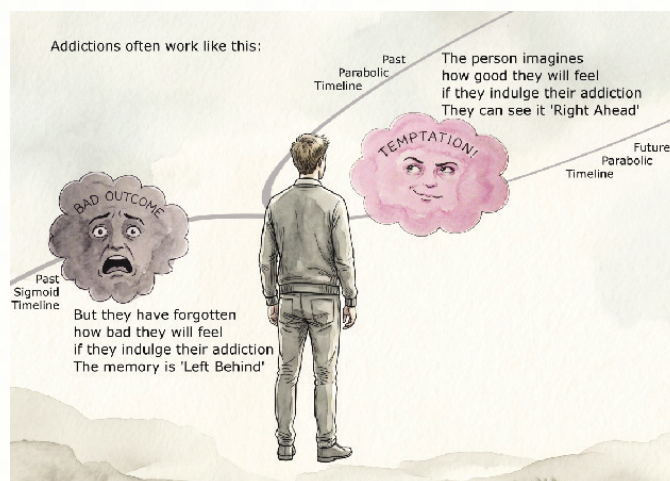
Therapeutic Use

For resolving traumas and unpleasant memories, a proficient therapist will often use a distant left-right timeline in order to disassociate their client from the issues, as if the client is looking at their life from the perspective of a guardian angel or a wise and beneficent friend. This way, it is easy to recognise and learn from one's mistakes, seeing how one might have handled a situation differently in the past. Thus often resolving fears and regrets. I recommend finding an NLP Master Practitioner if you want to engage as a client in this kind of work.

Parabolic Timelines

When we are less deliberate about reviewing the past and planning the future, many people unconsciously view time as being along a parabola, with the past away in front to the left. The present is in line with where they are, and the future is away in front to the right. In planning mode, this allows a person to pick what has worked in the past and sort of slide a copy of it into the future. You can also see what did not work in the past and modify that so that problems are avoided in the future.

The location of 'Now' on that parabola, makes a difference.

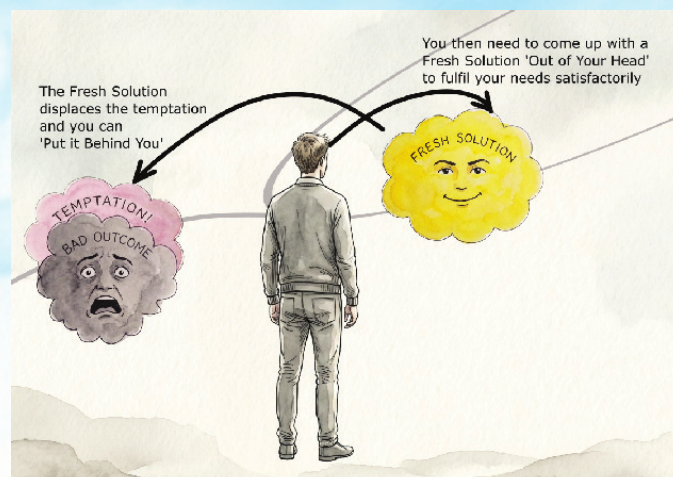


If 'Now' is in their head, it tends to cause confusion.

If 'Now' is in their chest, they tend to be too attached to both the past and the future and again are less able to plan clearly.

Rarely, if the present is behind them, they are disoriented and find it difficult to compare 'Now' with past or future.

The ideal is to have the present at upper chest level, a little under an arm's length away in front of you. This gives you sufficient disassociation, even from the moment of 'Now' as well as a good perspective of past, present and future.



Sigmoid Timeline

Often, when we think about things in the past, it is as if they are 'Left Behind.' For a right-handed person, the future would be the half parabola on their right, in front, whereas the past bit would be the reverse of the left of the parabola, so that it veers off to the left, but behind them. Combined, the future and past make a sigmoid line. For people who had a nominally Christian upbringing, when they think of having believed in Father Christmas, it is as if that idea is to the left, a long way behind them.

Addictions

Many people want to leave the past behind them, but there is a risk here. It means that they may not readily look at even the recent past, which makes them vulnerable to repeating their mistakes.

This is particularly the case with addictions, where the temptation, seen right ahead, bold and bright, and within arm's reach, is very compelling, but the memory of the negative results of the last time, is behind them, out of awareness. Therefore, they make the same mistakes over and over again. Better for them to have the vivid memory of the negative consequences clear in front of them to the left, so that they can now transfer that across to the right, bigger and bolder, and just beyond their temptation.

This will discourage them, though they still need a far better short and long term alternative to boldly displace the temptation and knock it over to the left



and then behind them. So that now the whole idea of the addiction has been 'left behind' and they can get on with improving their life.

Pseudo-Orientation in Time

Pseudo-Orientation in Time is a full association of yourself in the past or in the future, seeing what you saw or would see, hearing the sounds, and feeling the sensations, as if you are there right now.

Of course, we do this naturally. We can revel in the past, or be lost in a daydream in the future. This can be motivating. We can also get stuck worrying, revisiting something, or dwelling on or in something negative that may happen. This rarely helps to resolve the issue, so you need to disassociate and look at it from a safe distance so that your mind is more resourceful.

Applications

Having first seen from a disassociated point of view how we might have handled something in the past, we can then associate into that situation and live a false memory of how we would have resolved it, had we known then what we know now. This acts as a rehearsal, and cements a positive experience of handling the situation into your memory. This is then the first thing accessed by our minds if we encounter a similar situation again. We know it is a false memory, though we are not fooled by it. Our neurology simply treats it as more relevant than the original one so long as it produces a positive outcome.

Likewise, having seen how to resolve a future situation, you can associate into that and again live through dealing with it successfully. This programmes your mind to know what to do if it occurs.

Planning a Project

If you have an ambition, imagine floating high up above your life and floating out into the future above your timeline, and then land yourself vividly into where you have achieved it. Notice everything about your success first. Now look back towards the present to see what you had to do to get to where you are (in the future) now. Imagine each stage as vividly as possible. Work out timescales and then return to the present, knowing that the deeper part of your mind is now already programmed to take you through those stages towards your objective. This is far more powerful than ordinary positive thinking and is superbly described in Paul McKenna's book, Power Manifesting - The New Science of Getting What You Want (2025. ⁵) Paul McKenna's hypnosis is based on Milton Erickson and NLP. He is an NLP Master Trainer and co-trained with Richard Bandler when I was learning NLP and assisting on their courses.

No Regrets Coyote

A very useful technique when encountering a new person or opportunity, is to imagine yourself in the future, maybe in a month or year or much longer, looking back on what may have transpired and noticing if you feel good about it. This is a way of accessing your unconscious perception and processing, which we do not have direct access to. You can also invite someone you are considering embarking on a project or relationship with, to do the same. Tell them

“OK, so I want you to imagine yourself in the future, maybe soon or maybe in a couple of years’ time, looking back on what we may have shared together, and let me know if you feel good about it now!”

If they are congruent that they feel good, it implies that they have immunised themselves against possible regrets and are willing to take responsibility for their own part in the project or relationship. If there is any indication of doubt in what they say, their tone, their body language, hesitancy or expression, it is probably best for you to avoid going ahead with them. It means they are not fully comfortable with the idea.

Temporal Predicates

Any words that indicate or represent time, the passing of time, the past, present, or future are called temporal predicates. The previous example shows how we naturally use these to get others to manipulate time.

“In the future”

“Soon”

“A couple of years’ time”

“Looking back” (Implied by context)

“May have shared”

“Feel good about it now!”

In this case ‘now’ gets the person associated into the future and the present at the same time, bringing the expected good feelings from the future directly into the present.

One of Richard Bandler’s classic opening therapeutic questions is:

So what seems to have been the problem, now?

This frames the problem as having been in the past, and casts doubt on whether it actually was a problem or just seemed to be. Without denying that it may still be a problem, it brings the person directly into the present, here and now, where the problem may not exist. This disassociates the client from the problem and allows a fresh perspective for them to start looking towards the future.

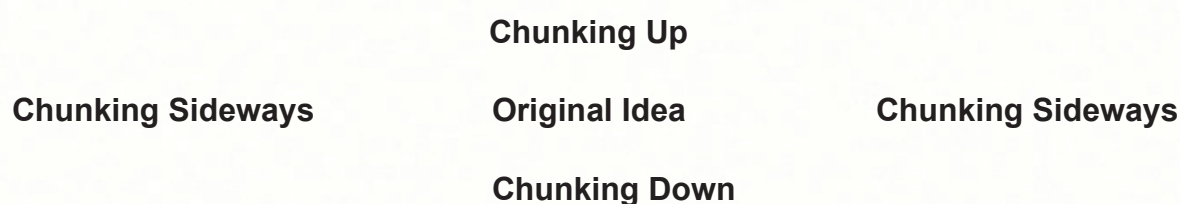
Chunking

Q: How do you eat an elephant?

A: One bite at a time!

In NLP, this concept of organising ideas and understanding their relationship is called 'chunking'.

There are three ways of chunking. Either differentiating ideas into smaller pieces, 'chunking down', organising into more generalised categories, 'chunking up', or 'chunking sideways' which is finding things in the same or similar category.



This can be used to resolve many organisational challenges. It can also be used to clarify our desired outcomes. We may have a specific desire; however, that desire is unconsciously intended to fulfill a more important need. An archetypal example might be:

A man is conflicted. He wants a sports car, but it is impractical for him and he cannot afford it.

One might ordinarily ask: "Why do you want a sports car?" though this is unlikely to be productive. Alternatively, you could engage him like this:

You: "So you want a sports car?"

"What specific car do you want?" – Chunking down. This gives no information about why he wants it, but helps to associate him with imagining having this specific one.

Now you can say:

"Imagine you have this sports car right now. You're in it, you're driving it.

You see what you see, hear the sounds, feel the sensations...

What does having this sports car achieve for you?"

Man: "I can drive fast, and that's exciting." – Higher chunk.

You: "What else does it achieve for you?" – Sideways chunk.

Man: "It makes me feel good. It makes me feel like I have arrived. It makes me feel that people will respect me." – He has chunked up higher than excitement.

You: "So here you are. You are standing outside your sports car, and people respect you. Notice how this makes you feel.

What does being respected like this achieve for you?" – You associated him with the higher chunk.

Man: "I feel confident. I feel that the kind of partner that I would like to be with would want to be with me." – The man has chunked up a level again.

You: "So here you are, you're confident. Your ideal partner is with you.

What does this achieve for you?" – You associated him into this.

Man: "I feel complete in myself." – Very high chunk.

You: "So here you are right now.

Feel what it feels like to be complete in yourself right now.

What does this achieve for you?" – You associated him in this.

Man: "I feel comfortable, at peace, complete."

At this stage, the man has chunked up to recognise his higher values of what he hoped to achieve from owning the car, or even thinking he needed a partner for.

Further questions will simply bring up the same or similar values and goals.

You could now say:

"So here you are...

You feel comfortable, at peace, and complete in yourself right now...

So, what else could have practically and reliably produced this sense of comfort, peace, and being complete in yourself right now?"

This invites the man to chunk sideways from having the sports car or partner, to however else he might more readily feel complete in himself. Examples might be:

Sorting his life out, getting a satisfying job, finding a hobby that satisfies him, learning to develop the confidence within himself to approach a potential partner.

Between you, you could chunk down into the details of each of these options, perhaps chunking sideways through various details. You could also chunk up to the more general examples of these aspects: the types of job or hobby, different types of personal development and confidence courses and disciplines (maybe try some Alexander lessons!)

The immediate need for the sports car or even a partner, is now averted, and the ultimate aim of feeling complete is already achieved from within himself. Though he may need to take action on his life, to make this feeling reliable.

NLP Language Patterns and Chunking

Meta Model

This usually chunks down from generalities to specifics. What specifically is being presumed in a presupposition, and how is that justified? How can we learn the original intent of a lost performative or modal operator of necessity? What or who is referred to by the particular noun or referential index specifically? What is the actual action of the unspecified verb? How is it done? What is the specific missing information?

Sometimes we need to chunk sideways. In modal operators, what would have to be true to go against a rule or social norm or to overcome a limitation? In cause-effect ill-formedness, what else could be the cause of the effect? In complex equivalence, what else could be meant instead of the assumed conclusion?

Milton Model

This chunks up from specifics to generalities, from concrete to theoretical. All the meta-model principles can be reversed. This then allows the listener to fill in their own details of what the generality means for them.

Instead of describing how to be confident, you invoke the concept of confidence for that person. As you do, they step into their own idea of what that feels like and therefore they create their own version of confidence.

Reframing

Richard Bandler once claimed that the book Reframing (1982)⁶ was cobbled together by the publishers in order to have something else to sell. However, you could say that any form of looking at the same thing from a different point of view, a different time frame, with different submodalities, or from a different chunk or logical level is a form of reframing.

There was once a television advert for a newspaper, showing a young man barging an older woman in a busy street. It then replayed the shot, but showing that there was something about to fall on the woman and that the man had saved her from it. The newspaper was, of course, demonstrating that you needed the wider frame or context to understand the actual story.

In 1946, talking about the risk of nuclear war, Albert Einstein said:⁷

“... a new type of thinking is essential if mankind is to survive and move to higher levels.”

This has been misquoted to say that a problem cannot be solved at the same level on which it was created or that it exists, which is probably true. One needs to be able to look at any problem or challenge within a much wider context in order to see where solutions and potentials are. The simple act of disassociating oneself from a problem or a challenge or even an opportunity allows you to let go of your emotional attachment and see things more clearly and objectively within a very much wider context.

Summary

In order to drive a car, you do not need to know how either the engine or the steering work. With practise, you get to drive it without even thinking about it consciously. As humans, we grow up completely unaware of how we ‘drive’ our own minds. We do not know the structure of our own thinking. We rarely know when we are talking to ourselves, and are unaware of the tones that we use. We are unaware of visualising or how we visualise, or how our structures affect us emotionally to demotivate or motivate us. Many of us are victims of reliving the mistakes of our past or of worrying about the future without knowing how to resolve either of these efficiently. We are stuck in our habitual thinking patterns. When you become aware of these patterns, you are able to interrupt them and choose different ones, which serve your purposes better.



I strongly recommend that people deliberately practise instantly disassociating from any situation that demands clearer thinking and more positive action. This is potentially easier for us as Alexander teachers and students, as we have learned to inhibit our immediate response to a stimulus, allowing that space for something different to occur to us, to either think or do.



Alexander's principles of inhibition and conscious choice match perfectly with knowing how our minds work. We are able to choose how we think, what choices and decisions to make, and what beliefs to form. Together the Alexander Technique and NLP make a mutually supportive structure which I believe the world so desperately needs to get beyond its current problems.

Notes

1. Lao Tsu. *Tao te Ching*. Translated © 1972 by Gia-Fu Feng and Jane English. London, Wildwood House.

2. Presuppositions of NLP:

These presuppositions are mostly drawn from an interactive training resource I was helping to write, called PowerSense. It was never published. I have copyright over my writings for it. It in turn was drawn from various training manuals including: Bandler, Richard and La Valle, J. 1996. *NLP™ Master Practitioner Manual*. Newark, Nj: NLP Seminars Group International. (Private manual.)

3. Ashby's Law of Requisite variety:

Wikipedia has: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Variety_\(cybernetics\)#Law_of_requisite_variety](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Variety_(cybernetics)#Law_of_requisite_variety)
Accessed May 2026.

In 1964, W. R. Ashby developed a law or principle based on information systems. These are subject to distortions and therefore need systems to detect and correct them. A glitch in a Youtube video is of little consequence, but one in your bank account could be disastrous. Ashby proposed it was like a game, where one player would produce distortions and the other had to have sufficient options to detect and correct them sufficiently. The requisite variety was the threshold number of options that the second player needed to achieve this. Ashby helped formalise the logic and mathematics for this.

He then proposed more generally that greater variety meant more control over a process. Bandler, as a mathematician and computer scientist in the late 60 and early 70s, would have been well aware of Ashby's Law and readily seen its human equivalent when modelling people and their interactions. Hence the presupposition:

The individual with the greatest flexibility of thought and behaviour will generally control the outcome of an interaction.

This has since been adopted widely as a principle in business organisation.

4. Joyce, James. *Dubliners*, 1917. pp. 133-4, New York, Ny. B. W. Huebsch.

From https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Dubliners/A_Painful_Case Accessed May 2026
(1st edition 1914. London. Grant Richards.)

5. McKenna, Paul. *Power Manifesting: The New Science of Getting What You Want*, 2025. London, Headline Welbeck Non-Fiction (Hachette.)

6. Bandler, Richard and Grinder, J. *Reframing: Neurolinguistic Programming and the Transformation of Meaning*, 1982. Moab, Ut. Real People Press. Available at: <https://lifechangework.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/richard-bandler-john-grinder-reframing.pdf> Accessed May 2026.

7. The New York Times, 1946, reports Einstein's speech here: <https://www.nytimes.com/1946/06/23/archives/the-real-problem-is-in-the-hearts-of-men-professor-einstein-says-a.html> Accessed May 2026.

Having come across NLP during his last year of Alexander Technique teacher training in 1990, **David Owen** attended, assisted, and even ran many NLP courses. He qualified as an NLP Master Practitioner with Dr. Richard Bandler, its originator and Dr Paul McKenna in 1997 and as a trainer in 2001 and assisted them for some years. He applied the principles of NLP, as well as positive reinforcement, to teaching the Alexander Technique from early in his Alexander teaching career. He is now developing Loosen Up™ both to train teachers his teaching methods as well as to promote the Alexander Technique globally.

He can be emailed at loosenup.org@gmail.com and his websites are <https://loosenup.org/> and <https://alexandertechniqueplymouth.co.uk/>



Doctors Paula and Richard Bandler
with David Owen. Admiring his tie.
August 2025