

changing old habits, trying new pursuits

# new year new you

THE NEW YEAR IS THE PERFECT TIME TO THINK ABOUT MAKING POSITIVE CHANGES – BE THEY IN YOUR CAREER OR PERSONAL LIFE. IT'S IMPORTANT TO EMBRACE CHANGE INSTEAD OF FEARING IT, BUT THAT'S EASIER SAID THAN DONE FOR MOST OF US. BUT ONCE YOU BECOME COMFORTABLE REGULARLY STEPPING OUT OF YOUR COMFORT ZONE, YOU CAN SET THE ULTIMATE EXAMPLE TO CLIENTS STRUGGLING TO CHANGE THEIR NEGATIVE HABITS. BECOME A MASTER OF CHANGE BY BROADENING YOUR FITNESS HORIZONS, PRACTISING NLP, OR SIMPLY TRYING SOMETHING YOU'VE NEVER CONSIDERED BEFORE. ▶



# using NLP to your clients' advantage

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## HABITS ARE SIMPLY PATTERNS OF LEARNED BEHAVIOUR. NLP CAN PROVIDE A TOOL FOR BREAKING YOUR CLIENTS' BAD HABITS AND DEVELOPING NEW POSITIVE ONES

**M**otivation is critical for people to achieve good fitness. A trainer can tell clients what they need to do and how to do it, but that will not make any difference unless they are already motivated and fully focused on changing their lifestyles. NLP (Neuro-Linguistic Programming) is the art of recognising behavioural patterns, and using language and the mind to change behaviour or increase motivation. It can be a very effective way of motivating clients and helping to break old habits that limit their progress. Practised by athletic coaches for decades, it is a means of communicating with an athlete which ensures they are focused, positive and highly motivated to achieve optimum results.

It can make a difference between developing an excellent athlete and an average one, or in the case of PTs and gym instructors, a person who is motivated to get the best out of their training and one who is not. Here are some techniques which could improve the way you communicate with clients, which will in turn improve their motivation, focus and eating habits.

### establishing benefits and consequences

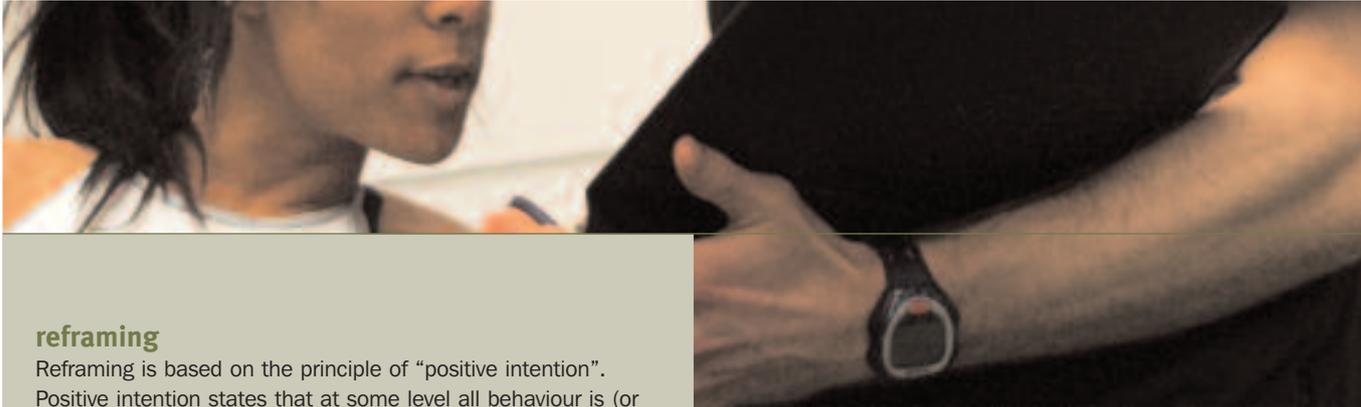
A good question to ask your client is: "What are the positive and negative consequences of my actions?" Some people are motivated away from pain, for example: "if I don't give up smoking it could kill me"; and some towards pleasure, instead thinking: "if I give up smoking I will feel fantastic and be able to go for runs". It is very beneficial to know which category your

client falls into, so you can establish how to motivate them. You can find this out by asking why they want to exercise more or eat less. Is it to be able to fit into that dress, or to avoid health problems in future? Once you have this information, you have a very specific goal to focus on with your client.

### positive instruction

If I say: "don't think of the colour red", what do you immediately think of? The mind processes a positive instruction faster than a negative one, which is why you can't help but focus on the colour red after hearing that sentence. So, when working with clients, state what you want, but avoid telling them what you don't. For example, if explaining some of the mechanics of an exercise such as the rowing machine, be positive in your instruction. Ask clients to "keep the elbows close to your body", "move from your hip joints" or "keep the pelvis and back moving together".

If for some reason it is important to explain exactly what you don't want them to do, follow it up immediately with what you do want, and emphasise it by voice tonality. For example, if you have a client on the rowing machine going hell-for-leather giving his best though his technique is poor, and you need to tell him/her to slow down. Though you still want the same work ethic, you could tell them to ease off or stop, but then reinforce the positive – ie, "your effort was great, though we just need you to improve aspects of your technique" – or by repeating what you want them to do, or both.



### reframing

Reframing is based on the principle of “positive intention”. Positive intention states that at some level all behaviour is (or at one time was) “positively intended”. Another way to say it is that all behaviour serves (or at one time served) a “positive purpose”. The positive intention behind eating chocolate, for instance, might be to comfort or reward oneself. In other words, every behaviour or response is aimed at getting a person something that he or she wants.

Once the positive intention behind the negative behaviour has been discovered, you can “reframe” their good intentions by finding an alternative that produces a more positive result. It is important to have other choices that are at least as effective for fulfilling the positive intention of the problem behaviour in order to appropriately address the obstacle.

Rather than feeling mistrustful, guilty or ashamed about difficulties, the recognition of your own positive intention leads to trust in your positive intent and gives a specific strategy for finding other alternatives rather than becoming frustrated with the typical “trial and error” (or “trial and horror” as it is sometimes called) approach.

The reframing process involves the client understanding and communicating with themselves, rather than blaming or punishing themselves. The basic steps involve:

1. Identifying the problematic feeling, response or behaviour. What behaviour or response is getting in the way of your client achieving their fitness goals?
2. Discovering the source of the problematic feeling, response or behaviour in your client’s past. When did this pattern of behaviour start and what were the conditions under which it began?
3. Finding the positive intention or motive for the response or behaviour. What is your client gaining from it?
4. Identifying alternatives and resources that address the positive intention, but without the negative consequences. What other ways can your client get the same benefit? What resources and understandings does your client have now that they didn’t when that this pattern behaviour started? (Find as many as you can.)
5. Trying at least three new alternatives to the original habit.

### resources

1. Lazarus J, *Ahead of the Game: How to Use Your Mind to Win in Sport* (2006).
2. Corselly K, Pearson JE, *Healthy Habits: Total Conditioning for A Healthy Body and Mind* (2001).
3. Revell J, Norman S, *In Your Hands, NLP in ELT* (1997).
4. Night S, *Breaking Old Patterns: NLP at Work* (2002).

### new behaviour generator

If you have a client who is struggling to perform a specific exercise, stick to a nutritional plan, or generally stay motivated, this NLP technique can be effective and is a quick and easy way of building a strong motivation for a desired behaviour. It is also more likely to produce a lasting change with the client.

1. Identify an exercise you’d like your client to do – one that your client understands is an important part of their training schedule, but doesn’t necessarily enjoy. It could be going for a run, going on the rowing machine or doing abdominal crunches.
2. Ask your client to imagine a time when they successfully completed the exercise and ask them to recreate the positive feelings they received from it. Now ask them to go back into the experience, ask them what they felt, saw, heard and what was it like.
3. Ask your client to imagine themselves in the future having just completed the exercise, and then to look at themselves after actually doing it. Get them to notice the benefits of having done it right now, and to think about the results that will arise from it.
4. Then, ask your client to think of themselves doing the exercise in the future easily and enjoyably. Every time they think of the exercise, they get a good feeling of anticipation, and hear positive and encouraging internal voices. Ask them to see how good that “future you” feels about the progress they’re making, then see them having a sense of joy and pleasure at having successfully completed the exercise and enjoying the benefits.
5. Ask your client whether they are happy with the change. If yes repeat steps 3 and 4, fine-tuning the benefits.
6. Identify when your client is next going to do the exercise, and get them to imagine themselves doing it, easily and enjoyably.

By doing this process you can assist your client to alter their perspective on difficult exercises in their training schedule and limiting beliefs which could be stunting their progress towards their fitness goals. **fp**



For over 15 years Jimmy Petruzzi has worked with elite sports performers including, among others, premierships footballers and rugby players, European Tour golfers, World and Olympic medallists, international athletes, cricket players, tennis players, professional football and sporting teams and establishments, politicians, entrepreneurs and stars of the small screen, helping them to achieve peak performance in all aspects of their lives. For more details on workshops email [info@petruzziperformance.com](mailto:info@petruzziperformance.com)