

Perceptual Filters

Every day we are bombarded with millions of pieces of information which the brain needs to make sense of. To help with this process the brain has developed a filter system that sifts information and disregards that which it perceives as irrelevant.

The information that then gets through the filters becomes our reality of our world. This is where the NLP saying “The Map is not the Territory” fits in, if you think of a



map it gives you some information about a place but it doesn't give you all you need to know in order to experience the place. Our Map of the World is not the same as someone else's Map of the World as we have both filtered out what our brain has decided doesn't fit or isn't relevant, it is our map at a point in time. Our Map of the World affects the language we choose to use and if our language is similar to another person's then we find it

easier to build rapport with them and vice versa.

The way we use our brain to sort out/filter information is called Perceptual Filters. The larger filters are where we generalise, distort or delete information as we look for information that supports our view and overlook other information that may be useful. We are mostly not aware that we are using a filtering process on a continuous basis.

If we really tune in and listen to what people are saying we can pick up a lot of information about the way they sort out or filter information. Picking up on these clues helps in enhancing our understanding of ourselves as well as others and provides us with ways of enhancing our communication.

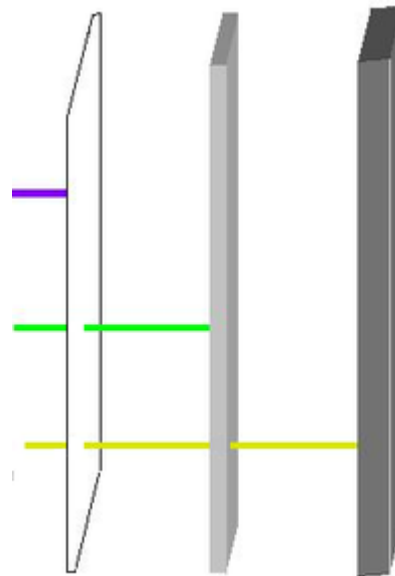
It's interesting to stop and think about what filters you use daily and whether these sometimes inhibit your experience of life. As you read the filters think about your choices.

Some of the common filters are:

Direction – Towards or Away from. This gives us an insight into a person's Motivation. Do they like to have a goal to aim for or are they motivated by moving away from something they don't like or don't want (wanting to hear the praise for achieving or avoiding being told off).

Chunk Size – Small chunk (detail), Big Chunk (ideas). This also ties in to the Myers Briggs bipolar scale for the way we take in information. Are we sensors and do detail or are we Intuitive and prefer the big picture. So are you boring them with all the detail or are they relishing it or should you be catching their attention with an overview and painting them a picture of possibility.

We can also use chunking up or chunking down when we are helping someone to understand their situation and what they would like to change.



Relationships - Same/Different. When looking at people/concepts/products do they look at how they are similar to other things/people they know or at how different they are. For some jobs we are trained to look for the mismatch – what doesn't fit/belong here. When aiming to persuade you can focus your messages on their preference – is what you are proposing similar to what they already have or different to what they currently have or are experiencing.

Primary Interest – People/places/things/activity/time. What is it that interests them? You can pick this up from listening to them talk about what they read, watch and do. When recounting a memory, for instance a holiday, what is it that they focus on in their description - the people present, the location, what they did?

Time – Past/Present/Future. When they talk are they experiencing the here and now of time or do they talk about the past, or are they planning for what might happen in the future. This tells us where their motivation is in terms of time and is part of their Time Line. People who are focussed on the here and now are often the ones who are late for meetings/appointments as to them what they are doing right now is the most important thing.

Emotional Stress Response – Associated/ Disassociated. When a person is talking about an experience, a memory, do they associate fully into the scenario, are they seeing it and hearing it as if they were there so that they experience real emotions or are they seeing it as an observer from the outside looking in dispassionately or disassociated from the experience?

Frame of Reference – Internal/External. This can give us information about a person's need for feedback and reassurance. Do they rely on information from others to reassure them they have done a good job – externally referenced? Or do they use their own thoughts and feelings to tell themselves they have done a good job – internally referenced?

Convincer System – see/hear/do. When aiming to convince someone of the brilliance of your idea/product it is useful to know which Convincer System they use, then you can tune your words into that. Some people need to see what you are saying if they are going to “buy it”. Others need to hear it not only from us but they want to talk to others who have “bought it”. Yet others need to experience the process/product before they are convinced it is for them. Alongside this there is also the number of times that a person needs to see/hear/do in order to be convinced. For some it only once, for others three or five times before they are convinced. So beware of giving up after one attempt, give them more opportunities to absorb and think about what you are saying.

So how can we use this knowledge of Perceptual Filters?

When managing or influencing someone at work or aiming to improve relationships with children and partners tune in to how they filter the world and the things they hear and see each day and you will make it easier for you to relate to them.

Following on from this, in NLP there is a technique called 2nd Positioning, this is where we aim to get into another person's Map of the World so that we can see what is important to them, it is a more advanced approach to empathising/establishing rapport and can be especially useful when persuading and negotiating.

Another way of using filters is modelling or emulating excellence. If we are highly aware of the sensory representational system that someone is using when they are successful and what they are tuned into, if we can reproduce that in detail then we stand a good chance of being able to reproduce their success for ourselves.

In my next article we will look at the process of 2nd Positioning and then we can move on to Modelling which is ideal for coaching and development – I am aware I did say we would cover Modelling in this article however, I think I have given you enough information and I don't want to make it too long and bore you!