

By the father and cocreator of NLP,  
NEURO-LINGUISTIC PROGRAMMING

SAMPLER

RICHARD  
BANDLER'S  
GUIDE to  
TRANCE-  
*formation*

HOW TO HARNESS THE POWER OF  
HYPNOSIS TO IGNITE EFFORTLESS  
AND LASTING CHANGE

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# Contents



Foreword.....	xi
Introduction .....	xv

## PART 1:

### PATTERNS OF PROCESS AND ELICITATION

*How People Create Their Reality, and How We Can Know*

1. Patterns, Learning, and Change <i>How to Take Charge of Your Brain .....</i>	2
2. Doing More of What Works <i>The Secret of Effortless Change .....</i>	7
3. Representing “Reality” <i>The Birth of Personal Freedom .....</i>	19
4. Language and Change <i>The Gentle Art of Casting Spells .....</i>	31
5. Directions or Outcomes <i>Planning to Succeed.....</i>	51
6. Seeing Inside the Black Box <i>Accessing Cues, Predicates, and Strategies.....</i>	65
7. Submodality Distinctions <i>The Differences That Make a Difference .....</i>	79
8. The Power of Belief <i>Pink Poodles and the Placebo Effect .....</i>	93

## PART 2:

## PATTERNS OF INDUCTION

*Hypnosis and the Art of Creating Powerful Learning States*

9. Developing Your Skills  
*Altered States, Hypnosis, and the Power to Learn* .....106
10. Hypnosis and Control  
*Success Is an Altered State*.....121
11. Inside and Down  
*The Patterns of Trance-formations* .....133
12. Deeper, and Faster, Still  
*Rapid Induction and Trance-Deepening Techniques* .....151
13. Remembered Peace  
*Accessing Previous Trance* .....161
14. Creativity out of Confusion  
*Pattern Interrupts, Stacked Realities, and Nested Loops* .....167
15. Advanced Submodalities  
*Freedom, Fun, and Fuzzy Function* .....179

## PART 3:

## PATTERNS OF UTILIZATION

*Using the Tools of Trance-formation*

16. Back to the Future  
*Changing Personal History*.....190
17. Pushing Past Limitations  
*Hesitation, Threshold, and the Freedom Beyond* .....209

18. Repatterning the Past: <i>The Magic of False Memories</i> .....	225
PART 4:	
TRANSC-FORMATION IN ACTION: <i>Client Sessions</i>	
19. The Structure of Trance-formation 1 .....	237
The Structure of Trance-formation 2 .....	243
The Process of Trance-formation 1: <i>Fear of Needles</i> .....	249
The Process of Trance-formation 2: <i>Fear of Flying</i> .....	270
A Trance to Fly By .....	284
20. In Conclusion .....	293
Glossary .....	301
Resource Files .....	305
Resource File 1: <i>Anchors and Anchoring</i> .....	305
Resource File 2: <i>Sensory Predicates</i> .....	308
Resource File 3: <i>Some Submodality Distinctions</i> .....	310
Resource File 4: <i>The Meta Model in Brief</i> .....	311
Resource File 5: <i>Milton Model Patterns</i> .....	316
Resource File 6: <i>Eliciting and Annotating Strategies</i> .....	327
Recommended Reading and Audiovisual Resources .....	329
Websites .....	330
The Society of NLP	
Richard Bandler Licensing Agreement .....	331
Index .....	333

# Introduction



IT'S BEEN FOUR DECADES since I started writing my first book, *The Structure of Magic, Volume 1*. *The Structure of Magic* was a book about how psychotherapists unconsciously use language.

Since that time, I've studied and modeled unconscious behavior, not just of psychotherapists and hypnotists and great communicators, but of experts in sports and many other fields, as well as of people who made profound changes in their lives with or without psychotherapists—people who were great learners, great inventors, great innovators.

My career modeling these people, and developing behavioral technologies aimed at helping people solve problems and achieve goals, has been long and in many cases very successful, even where other “experts” have been unable to help.

This book represents a little of some of the old things that I did, patterns that were in my books, including *Trance-formations*, *Frogs into Princes*, and *The Structure of Magic*. Many of these things, I feel, are still useful. They worked then, and they work now, so I offer them to you in the hope that you can learn from my years of experience.

I want to make clear the very real difference between my work and psychotherapy. People who know me know I always reject the “therapists’ label” for the following reason: most therapists looked for what was wrong and tried to get the client to understand what it was, so that the client could get better. These therapists believed insight was the magic key to change. However, years and years of

psychoanalysis didn't seem to do much more than give people reasons to stay stuck in their old ways, or even to reinforce the condition by repeatedly revisiting the problems of the past.

Other psychologists wanted to “condition” their patients away from their bad behavior toward what they thought of as good behavior. Then, of course, psychiatrists saw the medicalization of psychology as a major step forward; now therapists and doctors could give drugs to people so they didn't necessarily get better, but they didn't seem to care as much.

Still other people believed in an entirely mechanical approach to the brain and its functions. They saw it as a broken or malfunctioning machine in need of a physical tune-up. I once met a neurosurgeon who told me he didn't believe there was a single psychological problem that couldn't be solved by the application of “a bit of cold steel.” He was an expert in performing frontal lobotomies—operations where they removed part of the prefrontal cortex. It's true that people stopped being depressed or anxious, but then they just ambled around like sheep. I asked him why he and his colleagues stopped at the frontal lobe. Why not remove the whole brain? Then he'd solve every problem anyone had ever had.

Things have moved on since then. They don't do that many frontal lobotomies anymore. Increasingly powerful drugs can get the same result. People who get out of hand can just be chemically shut down.

I, on the other hand, was never that interested in the client's problem as such. I also didn't want to just fix clients and send them away. I wanted to teach clients how to solve the presenting problem and other problems that might arise long after they left my office. Then, when I saw how that could work, I wanted to lay the same kind of foundations for other people in the helping

professions—not just for therapists, but for anyone in the business of giving lessons to other human beings. I wanted them to understand that people need not necessarily be lost or broken or stuck for the rest of their lives, and they didn't have to be treated as disabled. They simply had choices to make other than the one that caused them problems.

I believe in the human learning process. Human beings learn automatically. We learn a language effortlessly because we're born with the wiring already in place for us to accumulate the means of communicating with other people of our kind. We are powerful language-learning machines, but we are also behavior-learning machines.

Some of the behaviors we learn turn into bad habits, and some turn into profoundly good habits. But the fact that we learn anything at all means we can learn something else—something more useful, quicker, and better.

We know now that it doesn't have to take time and hard work. In fact, human beings learn best when they learn fast, and when they learn to make things unconscious so that the behavior can run automatically.

Of course, whenever we're learning something new, it feels awkward at first. But we very quickly acclimatize to behaviors we persist in practicing. When we first learn to ride a bicycle, we have the balance, the steering, the pedaling to think about, all at the same time—and, at first, it seems impossible.

Then there is a magic moment when it all comes together, without effort. From that point, for the rest of our lives, we can always pedal and steer, even if we haven't ridden a bicycle in years.

Being an optimist, my hope is that everything in this book gets taken even further. People often say an optimist is someone who

sees a glass as half full, but a true optimist looks outside the glass entirely. We look at where the liquid comes from, and how it gets where it is. We look at the kind of containers it can be put in and how we can move it from here to there. We look at all the possibilities, and then we begin to understand that we don't just fill that glass, but we can fill vessels of all kinds, with different liquids, and move them around all over the world. In other words, we look for what we can apply elsewhere in other ways so we can start to do all sorts of things that have never been done before.

This is what successful and creative people do naturally. People who are successful in business—in fact, people who are successful in any field—don't just look at the short run, the immediate problem or challenge. They don't just look at what is. They look beyond, at how things got that way and how they can be better. Successful people apply their principles to solve many more problems and do many more new things for as many people as possible.

So now it's time to learn to ride a new kind of bicycle, a bicycle that's about personal freedom. I'm always fond of saying that the chains of the free are only in people's minds. Your fears, your doubts, your confusions, your habits, and your compulsions are all by-products of how you're thinking, and how you're thinking dictates how you're feeling and behaving and living your life.

If you have fears, it's not that heights or spiders or meeting new people, for example, scare you; it's that you *learned* how to be afraid of heights, spiders, and new people. Babies are born with only two fears: the fear of falling and the fear of loud noises. All other human fears are learned. Therefore, if you learned to be afraid, you can learn to be unafraid. If you learned to do something one way, you can learn how to do it totally differently and better. Learning is the way to personal freedom. Hypnosis and NLP are tools to make this easy and fun.

# PART 1



## PATTERNS OF PROCESS AND ELICITATION

HOW PEOPLE CREATE THEIR REALITY,  
AND HOW WE CAN KNOW

## PATTERNS, LEARNING, AND CHANGE

### *How to Take Charge of Your Brain*

I HAVE WRITTEN MANY BOOKS and talked to many hundreds of thousands of people about hypnosis and NLP, and people are still confused about the similarities and differences between the two. In this book I hope to simplify the issue. My attitude is that at some level or other, everything is hypnosis. People are not simply in or out of trance but are moving from one trance to another. They have their work trances, their relationship trances, their driving trances, their parenting trances, and a whole collection of problem trances.

One characteristic of trance is that it is patterned. It's repetitive or habitual. It's also the way we learn.

After we're born, we have so much knowledge and expertise to acquire—everything from walking, talking, and feeding ourselves to making decisions about what we want to do with the rest of our lives. Our brains are quick to learn how to automate behavior. Of course, this doesn't mean the brain always learns the "right" behavior to automate; quite often, our brains learn to do things in ways that make us miserable and even sick.

We learn by repetition. Something we do enough times gets its own neuronal pathways in the brain. Each neuron learns to connect and fire with the next one down, and the behavior gets set.

Sleeping and dreaming are important parts of the learning process.

Freud thought of dreams as merely "wish fulfillment"—and

maybe for him they were. I regard dreaming as unconscious rehearsal. If I do something I've never done before, I tend to go home, go to sleep, and do it all night long. This is one of the functions of rapid eye movement (REM) sleep. REM sleep is the way the unconscious mind processes what it's experienced during the day. It's literally practicing repetitively to pattern the new learning at the neurological level. Quality information and quality material are important to the learning process. If the brain isn't given anything specific to work with, it processes nonsense.

If we plan to take control of our learning, we need to understand that it's not only repetition that is important but speed as well. The brain is designed to recognize patterns, and the pattern needs to be presented rapidly enough for the human to be able to perceive the pattern for what it is.

Most people have drawn a series of stick figures in the margins of their schoolbooks, then flipped through them to make the figure appear to move. Each page has on it a static image, but the brain will find a pattern—in this case, movement—if the images run rapidly enough.

We wouldn't be able to enjoy movies without this process. We'd never be able to understand the story if we only saw one frame a day.

So, when we dream, we're running through things to learn, and we're not doing it in real time. "Internal" time differs from clock time in that we can expand or contract it. We learn at extraordinary speed—we can do maybe eight hours worth of work in five minutes before waking up. Sleep researchers support this idea. Subjects who report massively long and complex dreams are found through neural scanning to have been dreaming for only minutes, or even seconds, at a time.

Sleep, therefore, is one of the ways we program and reprogram ourselves. If you doubt your own ability to do this, try this out tonight:

As you're settling down to go to sleep, look at the clock, and tell yourself several times very firmly that you're going to wake up at a specific time. Set the alarm if you like, but you will wake up a second or two before it goes off.

This is something I've encountered in several different cultures. Some people gently bang the pillow with their heads the same number of times as the hour they want to get up.

Others tap their heads or their forearms to set their wake-up time. Whichever way it's done, the principle is the same; you somehow "know" you have an internal clock that you can set, using a specific ritual, and no matter how deeply you sleep, it will wake you as effectively as any alarm.

If we can program ourselves to do one little thing—such as waking without an alarm—we can program our minds to do many things. We can decide to go to the supermarket. Maybe we need bread, milk, peanut butter, and a couple of cartons of juice. We can drive five miles to the supermarket, walk through a thousand products, maybe talking to someone on our cell phone, and still remember the juice, peanut butter, milk, and bread.

Academics sometimes challenge me for something they call "evidence." They want to know the theory behind what I do; they want me to explain it, preferably with the appropriate research references. I've even had people ask for the correct citations for things that I've made up. The way I see it, it's not my job to prove, or even understand, everything about the workings of the mind. I'm not too interested in why something should work. I only want to know *how*, so I can help people affect and influence whatever they want to change.

The truth is, when we know how something is done, it becomes easy to change. We're highly programmable beings—as unpopular as that idea still is in some quarters. When I started using the term “programming,” people became really angry. They said things like, “You're saying we're like machines. We're human beings, not robots.”

Actually, what I was saying was just the opposite. We're the only machine that can program itself. We are “meta-programmable.” We can set deliberately designed, automated programs that work by themselves to take care of boring, mundane tasks, thus freeing up our minds to do other, more interesting and creative, things.

At the same time, if we're doing something automatically that we shouldn't be doing—whether overeating, smoking, being afraid of elevators or the outside world, becoming depressed, or coveting our neighbor's spouse—then we can program ourselves to change. That's not being a robot; that's becoming a free spirit.

To me the definition of freedom is being able to use your conscious mind to direct your unconscious activity. The unconscious mind is hugely powerful, but it needs direction. Without direction, you might end up grasping for straws . . . and then finding there just aren't any there at all.

## DOING MORE OF WHAT WORKS

### *The Secret of Effortless Change*

VIRGINIA SATIR, THE FAMILY THERAPIST, once said something that has stayed with me for many years. She said: “You know, Richard, most people think the will to survive is the strongest instinct in human beings, but it isn’t. The strongest instinct is to keep things familiar.”

She was right. I’ve known people willing to kill themselves because they can’t face the thought of life without the partner who’s died or left them for someone else. Even thinking about how things could be different overwhelms them with fear.

There’s a reason for this. One of the ways we make models of the world is by generalizing. We survive and prosper by making things familiar, but we also create problems for ourselves.

Each day you see new doors, but at a practical level you know each is still just a door. You don’t have to figure out what each one is and how to open it. You shake hands with thousands of people, and even though it’s a brand-new hand each time, it’s not a new event, because somehow you’ve made it “the same.” It’s been filed in the compartment in your brain called “shaking hands.”

But if you go to a country such as Japan where traditions differ, and you stick out your hand and someone bows to you instead, that action completely shatters the pattern. You have to come back to your senses to figure out how to respond in that new situation.

But that's the way it's supposed to work. When we're really thinking properly, we make everything familiar until the pattern doesn't function anymore. Then we review it and revise the way we're thinking.

Sometimes, though, we make something familiar, and even when it doesn't function anymore, we stick with it, and that's when it starts to make our lives dysfunctional. Instead of redefining the situation and coming up with a new behavior, we keep doing the same thing . . . only harder!

Pop psychologists talk about “the comfort zone” when they should more accurately be calling it “the familiarity zone.” People persist in situations that are extremely uncomfortable simply because they're used to them. They're unaware that they have choices, or perhaps the choices they present to themselves—like being alone for the rest of their lives because they'd left an abusive partner—are so terrifying that they refuse to change.

For years, psychologists have tortured rats by making them do things like run mazes for bits of cheese. The interesting thing about these experiments is that, when the scientists change the position of the cheese, the rats only try the same way three or four times before starting to explore other possible routes. When humans replace the rats, however, they just keep on and on and on, in the hopes that if they just do the same thing often enough they'll get the desired result.

Apart from proving that rats are smarter than people, these experiments show us that people will often stick to their habits until they're forced to change . . . or die to avoid that change.

All the work I do to accomplish change is based on one important principle. I go in and find out what works and what doesn't work. I slice away what isn't working and replace those areas with

new states of consciousness that work better. It's as simple as that.

The way I see it, there are three steps to making enduring change:

1. People must become so sick of having the problem that they decide they really want to change.
2. They have to somehow see their problem from a new perspective or in a new light.
3. New and appealing options must be found or created, and pursued.

As Virginia also said, if people have a choice, they'll make the best one. The problem is, they often don't have choices.

In these cases, hypnosis proves a valuable tool. By definition, we have to alter our state of consciousness to do something new. Hypnosis not only facilitates this but it allows us to minimize or remove the impact of past experiences and to create and install in their place newer, more useful, and more appropriate states. With hypnosis, we can help people discover choices and explore them. And, since time distortion is a characteristic of the phenomenon we call "trance," just as it is of dreaming, we can lead people through choices very rapidly. The learning tool of altered states permits us to familiarize the subject with a new experience in a fraction of the time it would take for them in an ordinary waking state.

For this to happen, we need somehow to reduce the impact on the subject of their past negative experiences, to make way for new and more useful ways of experiencing oneself and one's world. The way I work (and the techniques outlined in this book) permits a person who had been held prisoner by his past to make room for change.

Some of the patterns in this book lead people to “relive” their past in a new way, while other activities allow people to look at their past, and it just doesn’t feel like it quite belongs to them anymore.

But, to do any of this really creatively means that we need to understand how people create their representations of their world, as well as how we can help them build new and more resourceful alternatives. Why they behave the way they do is far less important than *what* they’re doing to set up their problem states and *how* they maintain them. When we know that, even the most impossible problem can have a solution.

When I started out, I asked some psychiatrists what were their most difficult clinical problems. Without hesitation, most of them said, “Phobias.”

This answer is easy to understand. Phobics always have their phobic responses, and they always have them immediately. They never forget.

People often describe themselves as “phobic,” when in reality they’re suffering from some kind of anxiety disorder. Anxious people have to work up to their anxiety attack; phobics don’t. They see or even just think *elevator* and instantly go, “*Aaargh!*” They never make an exception.

Phobias can either be learned, say, from a parent or caregiver, or instantly acquired by some emotionally overwhelming incident. Phobias are a graphic demonstration of the brain’s ability to learn something really quickly—often in a single pass.

Addressing phobias intrigued me for several reasons. Not only was I ready to respond to the challenge of doing the “impossible,” but I knew how useful it could be if people could learn to use the brain’s ability to learn quickly and easily to acquire more useful responses. Think of how different someone’s life would be if they

learned to feel instantly and completely delighted every time they saw their partner—and vice versa.

Even though people are often disabled by their phobias, they are always incredibly creative and committed to having them. They need to experience a unique trigger, make complex decisions, and have responses in less time than it takes to describe it. If they fear heights, they have to know precisely what “high” is to have the response.

One of the weirdest height phobias I ever encountered was in Michigan. I asked three hundred people if anyone had a really outrageous phobia, and a very distinguished gentleman, aged about fifty, raised his hand and said, “I’m afraid of heights.”

This didn’t seem particularly outrageous, but when I invited him up on to the stage, which was just a couple feet high, he turned pale and said, “No.”

I reached out my hand and said: “Step up on just one step,” but he stepped backward and his knees gave way. To me, that’s a real, flaming phobia. I went down in the front of the audience, turned him around, ran him through the Phobia Cure (see Chapter 16), then asked him what he did for a living.

He said, “I’m an airline pilot.” Something about my reaction or expression prompted him to say, “I know what you’re thinking, but once you’re in the plane it’s not the same.”

He explained that walking up a flight of stairs was impossible for him. He could only fly planes, such as 747s, that were accessible by a ramp. He told how, when he was in the air force, he had to close his eyes, then be lifted backward into the cockpit. Once he was inside an F-16, he was fine. He couldn’t climb a ladder to the plane, but he could fly it at twice the speed of sound and drop napalm across Vietnam without a second thought.

His problem had to do with the distinctions he made in his mind of how high “high” was. It had nothing to do with going up; it was all to do with looking down. Once he was high enough up, he was okay. He even told me: “If I get in an elevator and I go up to the eighth or ninth floor I can look out the window, or off the balcony, and I’m fine. But if I get off on the first floor, I’ve got a problem.”

If he was in one of those glass elevators, he wouldn’t be able to look out. He couldn’t cope with walking around and looking out of the first floor, but felt quite safe if his room was on the sixteenth floor. The only thing was, he had to go up to his room with his back to the glass, staring at the wall or the door.

How he developed his phobia to such an elegant degree is probably all very complicated, but it doesn’t really matter. What’s significant is that he made the distinction that being at a certain height meant he could fall—but if it was much higher, he was safe. As soon as he got high enough, the phobia simply stopped functioning.

Somewhere in his brain were a starting point and a cutoff point—both very specific, and both functioning entirely outside his conscious awareness. His starting point for a height phobia was the lowest I’ve ever seen.

When he left the air force and became a commercial pilot, he had no problem flying people around in 747s, but he couldn’t take a single step up. Of course, I did everything I could to get him fixed as quickly as possible. I don’t want crazy people in the cockpit of my plane. I want people who are completely unflappable, with great sensory acuity, so they know exactly where real danger begins and ends.

Interestingly, phobias often make a kind of sense. People usually become phobic about something that could actually harm

them under certain circumstances. When people come to me and say, “I want to be completely fearless around spiders,” or “I don’t want to be bothered by heights, no matter how high up I go,” I always make them step back and take a realistic look at what they are requesting. In some countries, such as Australia or Africa, having no fear of spiders would be extremely stupid. Some spiders are very poisonous. Likewise, a man with a phobia of heights who told me he wanted to be able to dance fearlessly along the rail of a balcony four floors up needs a reality check.

The outcome in curing phobias should always respect the fact that part of the person’s brain has actually been working very efficiently to help them avoid danger. The real problem is overreaction. The brain needs a new perspective to be able to change.

At the time I began investigating phobias, everyone was arguing over the right approach to psychotherapy. There were dozens, if not hundreds, of different schools of psychology, all fighting over who was right. The interesting part was that none of them was successful. Nobody was actually managing to cure anyone of their problems. To me, it seemed particularly foolish for a group of people who couldn’t do something to be arguing about the best way to not do it.

These therapists were limited by their own unconscious patterning, which predisposed them to failure. They were all looking at the *content* of the client’s experience—the “why”—to discover what was wrong and find ways to put it right. They were paying too much attention to trying to interpret what their clients were saying, and not noticing what they were doing.

I approached it differently. I advertised in the newspaper for people who’d had phobias they’d recovered from and offered to pay them money just to sit down and talk about their experiences.

I didn't really expect to get more than a few, but it turned out there were many, many former phobics who were happy to talk about themselves.

They all told me more or less the same story. They said things like: "One day, I'd just had enough. I said: 'That's it! No more!'" Then they all said: "I looked at myself and for once I saw how stupid it was to be acting the way I was and I started to laugh . . .," and then they changed.

I noticed that when they made the change, they switched to *watching* themselves doing the behavior. Those people who lost the phobia were no longer thinking of the experience as if seeing it through their own eyes but were literally recalling it from a different point of view—that of an observer. No matter how scary the phobia had been, it no longer affected them the same way when they took up this detached or "objective" point of view. Inadvertently, they'd discovered how to dissociate from the problem experience.

People who still had their phobias, on the other hand, were looking at spiders or planes or elevators as if they were actually there. Because they were representing the thought from a point inside the experience, part of their brains responded as if the experience was actually happening and plunged them even deeper into a state of panic.

Even though each of them had differing stories to tell about their particular phobias, the only difference I could see was in the way they were representing the experience of their phobias to themselves. So I had some people with phobias apply what I had learned. I had them "step out" of their bodies and watch their responses as if from across the room. And it worked. They got rid of their phobias really quickly. Their brains simply shifted the way

they perceived their situation, and their problems went away.

The psychiatrists responded by sending me more and more people with phobias. Some of them were extremely creative and entertaining in the way they had set up their problems. For example, one man had developed a phobia about leaving Huntington, Ohio. He'd be driving along quite happily, then come to the city limits, skid to a halt, and freak out. He hadn't been able to leave town in four and a half years.

Since I was always trying to find easier and faster ways of doing things, I had him imagine he was Superman. I got him to float out of his body and fly alongside, watching himself driving his pickup truck. He flew for a couple of miles, then saw himself begin to get nervous, jam on the brakes, and start to panic . . . *but he flew on!*

What made the difference was a trick. Inside his mind, not only was he calmly flying along, but he also left town for the first time in years. Now, since part of his brain could perceive *that* experience as real, I could start to put together the stimulus he had with the response he desired. We sent him out to go for a drive, and he was away for hours. When he came back he was astonished. He said he'd driven to the city limits, come to a bridge leading out of Huntington, all the time waiting for his phobia to kick in—but he just drove on.

Needless to say, some psychiatrists were deeply skeptical. They kept telling me that change had to be painful and slow, and I said, "Well, that hasn't been my experience. I've changed rapidly, many times, without any trouble."

Actually, we all have. Maybe you read something in a book that changed your life in a second. Someone might have said something that instantly changed not only the way you did certain things but the entire quality of the experience you were having.

Suddenly, without actually realizing it, something happened that switched off the problem and turned on the solution.

It fascinated me that among all the warring factions, a few therapists scattered around the country seemed capable of acting as genuine change agents, and I was driven by curiosity to know how they did it. That was my rule then and remains my rule now: if you want to find out how to do something you can't yet do, find someone who can and ask them. Now we call that process "modeling," and some people have turned it into an unnecessarily long and complicated process.

When I first began investigating modeling, I was astonished to find that highly successful people were flattered to be asked how they got that way and were usually happy to talk. The only problem was that they didn't always know how they came to be the way they were.

## Exercise: Changing Feelings by Dissociation

1. Recall an experience that still causes you sadness or distress. As you remember it, make sure you are reexperiencing it as if it were happening right now. See everything through your own eyes, feel all the feelings—including the associated emotions—through your own body. Pay particular attention to any sounds; these might include anything that was said by you or any other significant participants in the original scenario. It may also include your own self-talk. Make a mental note of the degree to which this memory still causes you pain.
2. Now pretend or imagine you can step back out of the experience so you can see yourself there, as if on a screen. Push the entire scene away from you, further and further, noticing, as it moves into the distance, how the colors begin to leach away and the detail diminishes. Push it as far away as you need to push it to notice a distinct difference in the way you feel about the events.

**Note:** Unless you particularly wish to have the discomfort back, you can leave the experience where it is—or even spin it away into space and have it explode into the sun.

**“This wonderful book is for anyone interested in making their life significantly better. It is a goldmine of insights and techniques from one of the greatest geniuses of personal change. It will change your life!”**

—Paul McKenna, Ph.D., author of *I Can Make You Thin* and host of The Learning Channel’s *I Can Make You Thin*

**M**ore than thirty years ago, Richard Bandler set out to discover how some therapists effected startling change with their clients, while others argued about theories with their patients waiting in vain for help. Widely regarded as the world’s greatest hypnotist and one of the most brilliant minds in the field of personal change, Richard Bandler co-created Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), one of the most profoundly effective approaches for self-improvement. In *Richard Bandler’s Guide to Trance-formation*, he returns to his roots: hypnotic phenomena, trancework, and altered states to provide a highly effective prescription for quick and lasting change.

According to Bandler, “trance” is at the very foundation of human experience. People are not simply in or out of trance, but are constantly moving from one trance to another. We have our work trances, our relationship trances, and our parenting trances. Some of these states are useful and appropriate; others are not. With his signature wit and contrarian approach to therapy, Bandler shows how anyone can reset and reprogram their problem behaviors with lasting and life-altering results. Intriguing case studies, client dialogues, and exercises make this an engaging read for anyone, whether they are new to NLP, want to further their NLP training, or simply want to make a positive difference in their own lives.

**Richard Bandler’s** books have sold more than a half a million copies worldwide. Tens of thousands of people have studied his blend of hypnosis, linguistics, and precise thinking in the United States, Europe, and Australia. Bandler is the author of *Get the Life You Want*, *Using Your Brain—for a Change*, *Time for a Change*, *Magic in Action*, and the *Structure of Magic*. He coauthored *Frogs into Princes*, *Persuasion Engineering* and *The Structure of Magic II*. Visit [www.richardbandler.com](http://www.richardbandler.com).

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