

by Carol Goldsmith, PCC, NLPT

Return On Experience (ROX)TM

Capitalize on what clients don't think they know

If a telephone could ring with fear, then my phone was having a meltdown. My client, Ashley, was gasping for breath. "I just ran down four flights of stairs from my boss' office," she panted. "Margaret was supposed to speak at our industry's annual convention next week, but she's been called out of town to meet with our biggest client. Now she wants me to speak in her place." Before I could respond, Ashley added, "I'm absolutely terrified of speaking in public. Carol, you've got to help me."

I looked at my watch. We had 30 minutes. How could I help Ashley break through a paralyzing fear that outpolls most people's fear of death? On a conscious level, I hadn't a clue. Yet my subconscious coach knew better.

Eighteen minutes later, Ashley experienced a major breakthrough that changed her life – and my coaching – for good. "It's as if that fear had happened to somebody else a long, long time ago," she later marveled.

This article shares the coaching formula that helped Ashley, and later, hundreds of other 'stuck' clients, experience a sudden seismic shift – a potent blend of the most useful things I have learned from years of studying coaching and NLP.

NLP Origins

Modeling the success of other people is the genesis and genius of NLP. The field of Neuro-Linguistic Programming began in the 1970s at the University of California – Santa Cruz when a computer science student (Richard Bandler) and linguistics professor (John Grinder) teamed up to study the success processes of the era's most distinguished psychotherapists – most notably, hypnotherapist Milton H. Erickson and family therapist Virginia Satir. The two researchers' guiding question: "What's the difference that makes the difference between peak performers and everyone else?"

Bandler and Grinder painstakingly deconstructed the



patterns of body language (neuro) and verbal language (linguistics) of these top therapists, and codified them as step-by-step instructions for changing people's internal programming. After publication of the pair's two seminal NLP books, *The Structure of Magic I & II*, their new science of modeling success spread through the worlds of sports psychology, psychotherapy, and even Hollywood, eventually reaching the self-help masses in popularized form through the work of superstar success coach Tony Robbins.

After undergoing Robbins' 30-day Personal Power II program, I signed up for Tony's chest-pounding, fire-walking, trapeze-flying live seminars, joining thousands of other ordinary people who broke through their fears to do extraordinary things. I hired a Tony Robbins staff coach, attended coaching school (CTI) and NLP training in 2001, worked a year in the infomercial business, studied with Bandler and his first licensed NLP trainer on the East Coast, and eventually became a certified NLP trainer myself.

I cherry-picked the parts of NLP that helped my clients get rapid results. NLP's two linguistics models, the Meta Model and Milton Model, taught me more about deep listening and asking great questions than sixth grade grammar class, journalism school and coach training combined. The NLP criteria for defining a well-formed outcome provided useful questions and a checklist for precisely framing goals. While avoiding NLP's more therapeutic techniques and fast-phobia cures, I came to understand that there is very little difference between a therapist

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impact

verbally ‘inducing trance’ (Ericksonian hypnosis) and a coach doing guided visualizations. Neither involves dangling a pocket watch in front of mesmerized clients and counting backwards until they nod off.

Where my inner coach most di-

be, or believe to successfully achieve the desired outcome? Ashley needed confidence. Others may identify patience, persistence, gratitude, wisdom, trust, or some other empowering resource. These internal resources already reside in the client. Inner resourcefulness

“Inner resourcefulness makes acquiring external resources possible (capital, labor, equipment, cooperation, etc.).”

verged from NLP was in its emphasis on role-modeling the success of others. “If you want to succeed,” Robbins often says, “find someone who is getting the results you want, do what they’re doing, and you’ll get that result.”

Is that necessarily so? I wondered. And is role-modeling coaching?

Enter my client, Ashley. The following excerpts from our coaching conversation reveal how she went from terror to triumph on the public stage – not by role-modeling other successful speakers, but self-modeling a success of her own. Ashley discovered that success leaves clues in the last place most people think to look: their own direct experience. Her results are codified in an NLP-infused coaching model called Return on Experience (ROX).™

The ROX For Success

The ROX process gets underway after the client has answered the key coaching question, “What do you want?” by defining his or her desired outcome. Ashley’s desired outcome: “I want to speak in public with confidence and ease.” Embedded in her statement was an answer to the first ROX question:

1. What do you need?

What does the client need to do, have,

makes acquiring external resources possible (capital, labor, equipment, cooperation, etc.).

When clients identify what they need to succeed, their Return on Experience at level one (ROX 1) is Self-Awareness.

2. When have you experienced that?

The second ROX question is artfully vague. Notice the effect it had on Ashley:

Ashley: “I want to speak in public with confidence and ease.”

Coach: “When have you experienced that?”

Ashley: “Well, there was one time, but it was way back in high school. Does that even count?”

“Every experience counts,” I replied. “There is a record of that experience stored in your memory bank. We’re going to access that memory and learn from it.” Knowing that Ashley meditates, I asked her to close her eyes and silently replay the experience as if it’s happening now. “See what you’re seeing, hear what you’re hearing, and notice how you’re moving and feeling as you relive the memory. Let me know when you’re finished.”

Several silent moments passed as I waited on the telephone line. Finally, I softly inquired, “Ashley, what are you

experiencing?”

From the catch in her voice, I could practically hear her eyes welling up. “I ... had forgotten ... all about that,” she said haltingly.

Ashley had experienced herself at her best. No amount of encouragement or well-meaning advice could have broken through her fear that fast. FEAR (False Evidence Appearing Real) had been replaced by DEAR (Direct Experience of Achieving Results). She proved what coaches believe: Our clients have the answers they need to succeed. We just need to ask the right questions.

When clients experience themselves at their best, their Return on Experience at level two (ROX 2) is Self-Empowerment.

3. How did you do that?

A moment later, Ashley asked if she should tell me the story. “No. Stories are what keep people stuck,” I said. “If telling the same old stories over and over actually solved the problem, everyone would be problem free.” Instead, I wanted to know the structure of Ashley’s experience – a brief, play-by-play description of her mental movie.

Ashley described her high school speaking success:

“I’m sitting on the stage of a large auditorium in downtown Chicago. It’s the final round of a national high school debate competition. The auditorium is packed with several thousand people from all across the country: parents, teachers, reporters. I can feel the hot lights of the TV cameras on my skin; see the flash bulbs going off. When I hear the moderator call my name, I stand up, walk to the front of the stage with my shoulders back and head held high, and place my hands on the podium. Then I turn my

head to look back at the other speakers, and smile. I take a deep breath in and begin to speak with confidence and ease.”

Ashley’s all-but-forgotten high school speaking success contained all the clues she needed to succeed again. I asked what made her high school debate experience possible.

Ashley: “I was prepared.”

Coach: “How prepared on a 1-10 scale?”

Ashley: “A 10. I was totally prepared.”

Coach: “And how did you get prepared? What were the steps?”

Ashley’s preparation strategy boiled down to three steps:

- Find out what’s expected.
- Research and write the material.
- Practice until she “knew the material cold.”

Coach: “And how prepared are you now to speak at the convention?”

Ashley: “Barely a one. I was so stunned when Margaret said she wanted me to speak that I forgot to even ask what the topic is.”

Ashley had tacitly agreed to speak without knowing what was expected of her. No wonder she had been terrified.

When clients understand what makes the difference between then and now, their Return on Experience at level 3 (ROX 3) is Self-Knowledge.

4. How can you use that?

The fourth ROX question invites clients to use their learning to create an action plan.

Ashley committed to asking Margaret for the information she needed and following the rest of her preparation strategy. “What’s your level of confidence now?” I asked.

“A five or six,” she said. “I’m worried about the other speakers on the program. What if they repeat or con-

tradict what I’m saying?”

To counter this, I asked Ashley to replay her memory of the national debate competition and hit the pause button when she turned to look back at the other debaters and smiled. “Those were your competitors,” I said. “How did you do that and maintain your confidence?”

“Oh, we didn’t think of each other as competitors,” she explained. “By that time, we had all become friends. I looked back at them for moral support.”

Comparing then and now, I asked if Ashley knew any of the other speakers at next week’s convention.

Ashley: “I know of them, but I don’t know them personally.”

Coach: “How could you get to know them?”

Ashley: “I could call them up and introduce myself. Maybe have coffee to

“Our clients have the answers they need to succeed. We just need to ask the right questions.”

discuss what we’re speaking about.”

Suddenly Ashley had a new strategy for preparing to speak at the convention that she knew from direct experience works. In that moment, her fear went ‘poof.’ When clients put their self-knowledge to work, their Return on Experience at level four (ROX 4) is Self-Direction.

5. What results are you getting?

The fifth step of the ROX process is for clients to notice their results, determine if those results are getting them closer to or farther from the

desired outcome, and adjust course accordingly. Success is not a straight line. Nor is the ROX model. Clients can always zig-zag back to a previous ROX level to assess their needs, access other successes, and learn from their direct experience.

As luck would have it, Ashley and

I had a coaching session scheduled the day before her big convention speech. Was she ready?

“Almost. There’s just one thing,” she replied. “I’m going to be part of a panel discussion at the end of the morning session. I’m afraid I’ll sit on my hands and let the other speakers

hog the microphone. If I do that, I won’t be representing myself or my company well.”

Coach: “What do you need to represent yourself and your company well?” [ROX 1]

Ashley: “I need to intrude.”

Coach: “When have you done that?” [ROX 2]

Ashley: “I haven’t. It’s rude.”

Coach: “Do you know someone who intrudes without being rude?”

Ashley: “Yes. Margaret.”

Coach: “How does she do that?”

Ashley: “I don’t have a clue.”

Coach: “Find out. Replay a memory of Margaret intruding without being rude and tell me how she does that.” [ROX 3]

Ashley didn’t miss a beat. “She leans forward, looks the other person in the eye, and says, ‘That’s an excellent point. And to piggyback on that...’ ”

Ashley decided to make Margaret’s strategy her own. In true NLP fashion, she role-modeled another person’s style – but only after discovering and modeling her own.

When clients assess their results and adjust course accordingly, their Return on Experience at level five (ROX 5) is Self-Appraisal.

The NLP ROX

So how did Ashley do the next day on the convention stage? Her voice mail message attests to the power of coaching with NLP.

“Not only did I speak with confidence and ease,” she exclaimed, “I even interrupted another panelist when she started talking over the audience’s heads. We both got a huge round of applause. I can hardly wait to give my next speech.”

Ashley’s Return on Experience: priceless. ●

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