

Shared Values of the NLP Community

by

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Introduction

According to Webster's Dictionary, *values* are "principles, qualities or entities that are intrinsically valuable or desirable." *Service, profits, results, health, quality, and safety* are all examples of common values that may be held by a particular individual or group. Because they are associated with worth, meaning and desire, values are a primary source of motivation in people's lives. Shared values are considered to be the foundation of ethics, community and culture. When people's values are met or matched, they feel a sense of satisfaction, harmony, or rapport. When their values are not met or matched, people often feel dissatisfied, incongruent, or violated.

In terms of the Neuro-Logical Levels model, values operate together with beliefs to create meaning and motivation in our lives. They relate to *why* we think what we think and do what we do. Values and beliefs support the *identity* and mission of an individual or organisation, and provide the reinforcement (*motivation* and *permission*) that promotes or inhibits particular capabilities and behaviours. A particular identity or role, for instance, will be associated with several core values and beliefs. These, in turn, are supported by a range of skills and capabilities, which are required to manifest particular values and beliefs as actions in a particular environment or context.

Values Link Identity to Capabilities

In groups, organisations and social systems, values form a type of non-physical framework which surrounds all of the interactions of the people within the system. Values, and related beliefs, determine how events and communications are interpreted and given meaning. Thus, they are the key to motivation and culture. Shared values and beliefs are the "glue" which holds an effective organisation, community or team together. Conflicts of values are the source of disharmony and dissension.

Identifying Common Values Within the Global NLP Community

Many people think of the field of NLP as being simply a group of techniques and models—a kind of "toolbox" without a heart. The principles, tools and skills of NLP, however, presuppose certain values, which form the emotional basis for people's commitment to the field. NLP practitioners, trainers and institute directors share key values that serve as the underlying impetus for their involvement in the NLP community and their passion for sharing the powerful benefits of NLP with others.

One of the goals of the [NLP Millennium Project](#), sponsored by [NLP University](#) in Santa Cruz, California, in the Summer of 2000 was to identify some of the core values that make us a global community. The identification of these values can help to solidify the bonds between people within the community (as well as attract others who also share those values to the

field), and define ethical guidelines for the practice of NLP. The communication of these values to people within other professional groups and communities can help to strengthen the credibility of NLP and increase the appreciation for the intentions and motivations of NLP practitioners.

The group participating in the NLP Millennium Project numbered over 110 people (mostly NLP trainers and founders of NLP institutes) from 26 different countries around the world (including Russia, Japan, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Brazil, Argentina, South Africa, Hong Kong, and many others)—representing a diverse cross-section of our planet. Following a process I developed for helping large organisations establish common values, participants were asked to get into groups of four or five people and go through the following exercise:

1. Each group member is to share with the rest of the group some of his or her own personal core values; in particular those relating to his or her "mission" or "calling" with respect to NLP. In other words, answer the questions: "Why am I personally involved in NLP?" "Why is NLP important?" "What is NLP's contribution to the world?"
2. Make a list of the group members' key values and criteria and look for any similarities and commonalities.
3. Identify the deeper core value, on a higher level, presupposed by the individual values expressed by the group members. Try to find one or two single words or phrases that reflect and encompass all of the core values expressed by the group in some way.

Each group then made a presentation about its core value statement to the rest of the Millennium Project participants. These value statements were collected into a single list which was distributed to all participants. Participants were asked to select 7±2 of the values from the list (no less than 5, no more than 9) and rank them according to their importance (1 being the highest). Participants were also asked to write down one or two 'behavioural indicators' next to each value statement that they selected, to help define it more specifically.

The Twelve Core Values of the Global NLP Community

The top twelve values (and accompanying behavioural indicators) are listed below according to the hierarchy of importance given by the participants as a whole. This was determined by summing up the ratings given each value by the individuals who took part in the survey.

1. **Usefulness:** To be pragmatic and goal oriented. To seek to make a difference. To focus on practical applications. To use all available resources to reach a goal. To think and act with the end in mind. To meet needs in a goal-oriented and testable way. To chunk down into practical and testable steps.
2. **Integrity:** To "walk our talk." To have congruence in language and action. To have alignment between our beliefs and values and our behaviour. To act from our core values. To integrate all aspects of who we are. To be aware of our internal processes and beliefs and behave in ways that are congruent with them. To be truthful about our actions.
3. **Respect:** To acknowledge personal boundaries. To honor the potential within another person. To listen and give space to other's needs and expectations. To give all persons equal space and time. To ask for

permission. To maintain an unconditional positive regard for others. To honor the unique contributions of each person.

4. **Ecology:** To always work within the other person's well-formed outcome. To respond to our own congruency signals. To be systemically oriented. To consider the consequences of our actions. To respect positive intention. To reach for balanced outcomes. To seek to maintain a healthy balance among all systems. To consider our impact upon the larger system.

5. **Creativity:** To be free builders of our own lives. To develop well-formed mistakes. To be open to possibilities. To not accept the given as given. To find new questions. To make new models. To find new ways to reach a goal. To encourage others to express and share their inner dreams. To constantly challenge the way we do things and to innovate new possibilities.

6. **(Universal) Love:** To take second position with others (put ourselves in their shoes). To connect through deep second positioning to the energy source within others. To feel and show compassion to others. To accept others for who they are. To offer a space where something can change. To value ourselves, and to value others as we do ourselves. To "see" and acknowledge the best in others. To choose to invest in the well-being of others.

7. **Freedom:** To have choice. To add more choices. To be able to choose. To allow others to make choices for themselves. To state our thoughts and feelings without fear of retribution. To honor people's right to their own development.

8. **Diversity:** To be unafraid of difference. To welcome the challenge of difference. To see the value in all maps of the world. To recognise and honor and value the differences in others. To accept different styles. To include different perspectives. To respect different cultures.

9. **Elegance:** To seek the shortest and simplest path to an outcome. To seek beauty and simplicity. To act with grace. To select the path and the tools that allow us to accomplish the most with the least effort.

10. **Professionalism:** To work with competence, creativity and joy. To observe precisely. To set high standards. To know our limits. To model excellence. To be congruent, clear and skilled at all times in any context in which we are representatives of NLP as a field. To know what we are doing, and to do what we know. To be able to demonstrate all NLP skills. To keep learning.

11. **Flexibility:** To have more possibilities in behaviour. To have more instruments for work. To be able to let go of our last discovery. To have a range of ways to reach a goal. To be open to change and additions from external influences. To adapt to different people and situations. To be able to adjust and adapt ourselves to unexpected situations. To utilise and react properly to the feedback that we get.

12. **Creating Artful Community:** To foster bonding and friendship for future projects together. To have concern for the "we." To act in service to others. To value the different gifts each person brings. To create affiliation and association which incorporate the wide variety of aspects of human expression. To connect with people as equals.

Some other notable values included:

Curiosity/Adventuring: Delighting in "not-knowing" and staying there long enough to make higher level discoveries.

Fun/Humor: Not taking seriously what is deeply serious. To enjoy one another and what we are doing.

Authenticity: To be ourselves. To share our own internal experience honestly with others.

It should be remembered that these are not ethical injunctions or rigid "modal operators" (i.e., "shoulds" and "musts"). Rather they are guiding principles which we aspire to put into practice more consistently in our personal and professional interactions.

A Culture of Leadership—Creating a World to Which People Want to Belong

In reflecting on this group of values, it is evident that some of them relate to *oneself*. Other values relate to how one interacts with *others*. Some relate to goals or the achievement of *goals*. Still others relate to the larger *system* in which one is acting.

Usefulness, freedom and elegance, for example, seem to primarily relate to choosing and achieving **goals**.

Integrity, creativity and flexibility, on the other hand, are primarily related to the way one conducts **oneself** while attempting to achieve goals.

Respect, love and community are clearly associated with one's relations with **others**.

Ecology, diversity and professionalism seem to be more connected to one's interactions with respect to the larger **system** within which one is interacting.

Areas of Values of the NLP Community

It is fascinating to note that the four elements around which NLP community values so elegantly cluster are the primary elements of effective leadership. In its broadest sense, [leadership](#) can be defined as the ability to involve others in the process of accomplishing a goal within some larger system or environment. That is, a leader expresses himself or herself (by being both a stimulus and an example) to influence individuals and groups towards achieving some outcome in the context of a particular system or context. The highest expression of this is known as "visionary leadership." Visionary leadership involves working with others (most often peers) to "create a world to which people want to belong."

One implication of the Millennium Project values study is that people attracted to NLP, and the values it represents, are naturally inclined toward leadership. As I mentioned earlier, shared values are the foundation of ethics, community and culture. The culture of NLP—as expressed by the values and skills it promotes—is thus ultimately a culture of leadership.

This is something that should be communicated not only to those learning to be practitioners of NLP; it should also be recognised and appreciated by the trainers and institutes that make up the NLP community at large. It is something to be shared, and something to be proud of.

Again, it is important to mention that the purpose of the Millennium Project values study was not to attempt to say that the twelve values that emerged are *the* values of the entire NLP community. The purpose was for representative members of the community to reflect on their core values and establish the beginning of a conversation about values. One goal of this conversation is to better understand the purpose and influence of values in the NLP community. We hope that many NLP trainers, practitioners, developers and institute directors will recognise and resonate with the values we have uncovered. We also hope that these values will help to serve as guiding principles for our work with others and our interactions with one another in the future.

I for one am proud and pleased to count myself as a member of a community that has these values, and I am committed to bringing them more into action in my life and work. I hope you are too.