

NLP: LOGIC, ADDICTIONS & CO-DEPENDENCY

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Note: This article originally appeared in *Alternatives* (a local New Orleans paper), February, 1991.

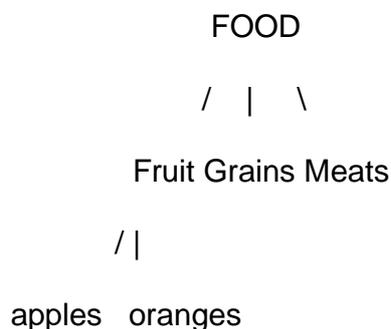
George Carlin began one of his most famous routines this way: "I used to be Roman Catholic, now I'm an American—you know, you growwww."

Most NLP trainers love stand-up comedy. Because of his gift for using language and his keen sense of logic, I'm especially partial to George Carlin. I also think he is a master at teaching the rest of us about how we think, and how we (mis-)use logic.

In the joke above, the laugh is in the logic, or more precisely, the error in the logic. Early this century, famed philosophers Bertrand Russell and Alfred North Whitehead

described the theory of logical types (the basis for the modern math concepts most of us learned called "sets and subsets"). It is one of the cornerstones of the study of logic and the pitfalls of using logic badly. The theory also explains the basis of most humor, and at the same time, most of our problems. In fact, if people understood logical types better, we'd have far more laughs and far fewer problems.

A couple of quick examples and you'll get the idea about logical types. Apples and oranges are different types of fruit. Fruit is a different type of food than either grains or meat. All apples and all oranges are still types of fruit, so we say that fruit is a higher logical level (apples are a "subset" of the larger set fruit). So apples and oranges are different logical types but on the same level as each other. Fruit and grains are of different logical types from each other, but they are both at a higher logical level than apples and oranges. Fruit, grains and meat all fall under the still higher category (level) of food. Easy.



Carlin's joke is a classic confusion of logical types. What makes it funny is that all of us, intuitively, know it. Being Catholic, or any religion, has nothing to do with citizenship or nationality. One is about beliefs, the other about where you were born. They are

different categories, or logical types. It gives a good chuckle in this context, but this same kind of thinking, in other contexts, can be quite damaging.

When Robert Dilts was here teaching about beliefs and how they affect health, he was cautious to make the distinction that beliefs are a logical level and that, at that level, many health issues can be addressed. But that is only one level of change and the others can be just as important. I'll explain these levels in more detail in a later article, but for now the levels of change look like this:

Spiritual

Identity

Belief

Capability

Behavior

Environment

All of these levels of analysis and change are important, and all operate differently from one another. Any change or solution people want in their lives will only occur if it is on the appropriate level to the problem.

Substance abuse, addiction and co-dependency are health issues, social issues, political issues, legal issues (unfortunately in my view), educational issues, family issues and much more. They affect, and are affected by, an individual's environment, behaviors, capabilities, beliefs, his or her sense of identity, or even his or her spiritual (attachment to "higher" purpose) dimension. This creates a marvelous opportunity for confusion of logical types and/or levels.

So, you may ask, what is the NLP approach to addictions and co-dependency? Well, the same as to all other human problems, it depends

In NLP we have been studying, and now know quite a lot, about the levels of change and how they operate in health, society, politics, the legal system, education, the family and many other contexts and systems. We also know that not everyone's difficulties fall into the same logical types, or occur at the same logical levels. We also know that the question itself is often the problem. The solution to the problem depends

on how the problem is perceived, or stated, to begin with.

Here is an interesting way of looking at this issue, from the point of view of linguistics and the logical levels of change I've described. Let's say you hear (or say) the following sentence:

"I don't think I can stop taking drugs now."

It's obviously a loaded sentence and it can be said in a variety of ways without even changing the words. Let's see what happens if we emphasize just one word or phrase. Read the sentence out loud, emphasizing the marked section, and see how the meaning is

affected:

"**I** don't think I can stop taking drugs now."

With this emphasis on the word "I" the person clearly is saying that HE or SHE doesn't think the drug taking can be stopped. This might imply that SOMEONE ELSE thinks he or she can stop even though the person taking them isn't so sure. This may be

more a statement about the relationship between the people than about the drugs. It may also be a statement about the person's perceived identity, or their beliefs about who they are, more than what they can do. Let's try it again with different emphasis:

"I don't **think** I can stop taking drugs now."

The sentence now is about what the person thinks, or BELIEVES, rather than about who they are, or who they are in relation to others. It is also stated in the negative, i.e. what the person CAN'T do as opposed to what they CAN do, or ARE doing. A clear statement of belief. Let's try another:

"I don't think **I** can stop taking drugs now."

Now the person is again talking about his or her own identity and capabilities in relationship to others. But this time the implication is that THIS person can't stop, but OTHERS can. This is stated as an IDENTITY level issue, COMPARING himself or herself to others (and we don't even know WHICH others). Again:

"I don't think I **can** stop taking drugs now."

Here we have a strictly capability level statement. This person is emphasizing what he or she can or cannot DO, not what he or she believes, or who he or she really is.

"I don't think I can stop **taking drugs** now."

This time we have a statement on the level of a specific behavior. This person may be able to start or stop lots of other things, but not TAKING DRUGS. It is not a statement about capability in general, only in this specific instance. And it does not emphasize the beliefs or the identity aspects of the problem at all.

"I don't think I can stop taking drugs **now**."

This final sentence focuses on something outside the person, perhaps in his or her environment—very different from the other sentences even though the words are the same. Here it says that this person may be able to stop taking drugs at some time, but not NOW. Perhaps something about this person's job, family or community, the time of year, some stressful occurrences—or some other factor we can only guess about—is the thing that prevents giving up drugs; as opposed to his or her abilities, beliefs or sense of self.

One sentence. Many meanings. Can you imagine how many different problems you could substitute for "taking drugs" in this sentence we've been examining? How about "eating too much." Or "drinking." Or "thinking of others and never myself" (or

worse, "myself and never others"). And could all of these exist on or affect each of the levels of change from environment to spirituality? You bet they could. And how many different ways could they be said, with how many different meanings, using different words.

It just may be that the reason that the field of addictions and co-dependency has grown so exponentially is because the confusions of logical type and level have

proliferated so geometrically. The faster the field grows, the more generalizations we hear. "Alcoholics always ..." "You can't change an addictive behavior unless you ..." "Once an addict, always an addict ..." "You're co-dependent in your relationships any time you ..." The problems with these generalizations isn't just that they are often wrong, but that they confuse the issues, and therefore the people who need, or provide, help.

NLP offers a lot of clarity. The understanding of logical levels, and how to hear them in language is a great contribution. It begins to provide a focus that has been sorely lacking in the addictions field until now. NLP also offers specific techniques

for making REAL change, at EACH of the levels of change. Most importantly, it gives a framework for understanding the individual problems of individual people. Maybe that's the most human contribution we could ever make.

If we're lucky, soon you and I will never again have to hear what a friend once told me: "I used to try to hard to make people happy, now I'm a co-dependent—you know, you growwww.""

Obviously an entire book could be written on logical types, addictions and co-dependency, and the techniques that flow from this study could make it one hell of a text. Fortunately, it's almost ready—from Robert Dilts and Todd Epstein. No one could do it better.