

The Nature of Anchors

ANCHORS

The technique itself is based on a phenomena of human programming which the NLP people call *anchoring*. An anchor is like the "on" button of a stereo that plays an old recorded memory. An anchor triggers the sounds, sights (images), feelings and even tastes and smells of an old recorded memory. Words themselves are anchors. Words are triggers which stimulate the images and feelings of old memories.

When we talk about toxic shame, many memories are elicited unconsciously. These shame memories are often enmeshed in collages of imagery. When shame has become internalized, these images are often triggered and send the shame-based person into shame spirals. These spirals seem to operate independently of us. They seem to have a life of their own.

Shame spirals are also triggered by internal self-talk. Such inner talk is based on old beliefs we have about ourselves and the world. These beliefs were fostered by our shame-based caretakers. Auditory shame spirals result from introjected parental voices which were originally the actual voices of our shaming caretakers. They play like stereo recordings in our head. The Transactional Analysis therapists estimate there are 25,000 hours of these recordings.

Touching your right thumb and finger together is a kinaesthetic anchor or trigger. Our lives are filled with old anchors, the result of neurologically imprinted experience. I've already talked about the brain

physiology related to traumatic experience. The more traumatic, the more powerful the imprint. Any time a new experience resembles the earlier traumatic experience, the original emotions are triggered and the original anchor is fired.

All of our sensory experience is encoded this way. We have visual anchors. For example, someone might look at you in a way that reminds you of the way your violent father used to look just before he hit you. This could trigger a powerful emotional response—even if you didn't consciously make the connection. Anchors can also be auditory, olfactory, or gustatory. A tone of voice, a certain smell, or a particular food can trigger old memories with their accompanying emotions. Songs are perhaps the most powerful auditory anchors. I'll bet you've experienced riding in your car listening to the radio and suddenly you remembered a person or scene from long ago. Our whole lives are an accumulation of such anchored imprints—pleasant as well as painful.

We can change the painful memories from childhood by putting them together with actual experiences of strength acquired in our adult lives. If you didn't get your childhood needs met, you can give yourself a new infancy. You can do this by anchoring actual experiences relating to the strengths you have now. If you had had these strengths in childhood, you would have fared better. Once we've anchored these strengths, we then anchor the lost feelings of childhood. Then we activate both anchors simultaneously to actually change your experience of your childhood.

"Giving Back the Hot Potato" is a way to change old imagery through the use of kinesthetic anchors (touch anchors). It is a form of re-experiencing the past with corrective resources. It is also a way of giving back what Pia Mellody calls the induced or carried shame.

When a caretaker acts "shameless" by raging, condemning, criticizing or being judgmental, we take on the shame they are avoiding. While they avoid their shame, we have to carry it. In actual fact it is our shame, i.e., we actually experience being shamed by their acting in a shameless manner. We accepted their judgment as being about us, when it was really about them. It is in this sense that we carry their shame.

Leslie goes on to explain that just as certain stimuli, like an old song, can bring back past experiences, we can learn to deliberately associate a memory to a specific experience. We can do this by accessing the memory and touching our thumb and finger together while we are re-experiencing that memory. Once the association has taken place, the touch of thumb to finger will then trigger the experience. We can then retrigger the experience at will.

Neuro-Linguistic Programming (N.L.P.).

The technique for changing your personal history is excellent for modifying specific and traumatic scenes from childhood. These often become what Silvan Tomkins calls "shaping or governing scenes," the filters that shape our developmental history. They anchor our pain and unexpressed emotion, and they are recycled throughout our lives.

Changing our personal history will also work with more generalized patterns, such as not feeling wanted as a child. Change history is based on the cybernetic premise that our brain and central nervous system cannot tell the difference between real and imagined experience if the imagined experience is vivid and detailed enough. As Leslie Bandler puts it:

The tremendous effectiveness of change history was discovered by paying attention to how people can distort their internally generated experience and then act on the distortion, forgetting that they created it in the first place.

People often imagine things happening in the future and scare themselves with the pictures they themselves make. As Leslie Bandler points out, jealousy is a prime example:

... jealousy is an experience almost always generated as a result of a person making constructed images of a loved one with someone else and feeling bad in response to the picture they have themselves created.

The person feels bad and acts upon that feeling as if it were really a *fact*. Or consider the power of a sexual fantasy. A person can create an image of a sexual partner or scene and be physiologically aroused by it.

Change history utilizes the same process deliberately. With change history you use the potency of your adult experiences to change the internal imprints from the past. Let's look at some examples.