

# NLP in Business and in Life

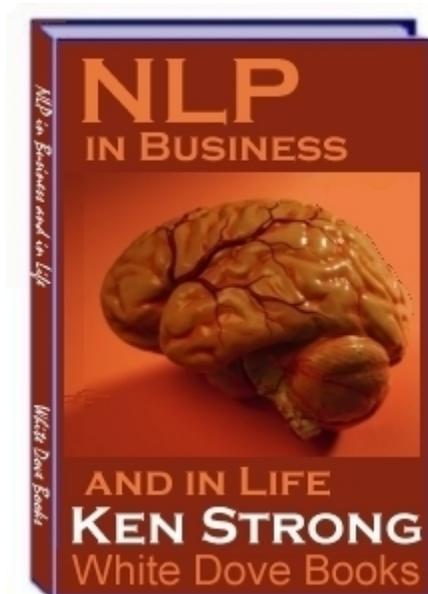
by Ken Strong

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# Introduction

You are the owner and operator of the most amazing, beautiful, and complicated computing device ever invented – your brain.

When you buy a new camera, or a new printer, or a new microwave oven, you most likely take some time to look through the manual and learn about what your new purchase can do, and how to operate it and get the most use out of it.

Yet your brain did not come with an owner's manual (how many pages long would something like that be, anyway?). So it's no surprise that people have occasional difficulty controlling how their brain works.

Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) can be described as studying how each of us builds our own mental and conceptual map of the world that we live in.

NLP means different things to different people, since there is no central governing authority or set of rules regarding its definition and practice.

But basically NLP helps us get out of our own way. We build up an arsenal of often-unconscious ways of reacting to certain situations in our lives, and often those reactions have become

outmoded and unproductive. If we identify and become conscious of those unproductive reactions, we can choose to change them, thereby removing roadblocks to our progress in creating the lives we really want.

Our reality map is unique to each of us; no one else has the exact same reality.

Furthermore, NLP can be used to change the way we interact with our reality, with huge implications for every area of our lives.

NLP draws its inspirations from a number of different areas of psychology and science. It's sort of an "open-source" system, with a large number of people constantly adding to its growing knowledge base.

In essence, and unlike many strands of mainstream psychology and therapy, NLP is less concerned with "curing" whatever is "wrong" with a person and instead focusing on what makes people effective and on what works well.

You may be familiar with the saying that "insanity is doing the same things over and over and expecting different results." NLP assumes that every person is already working perfectly, and that what appears to be "wrong" with someone is actually the perfect response to their current map of their world.

By changing your map (that is, how you think about the world and your place in it), you can change your behaviors.

Needless to say, NLP has many potential applications in business, along with the other areas of your life. There are models that can help you locate your hidden talents and skills and bring them to full flower, as well as teach those skills to other people.

There are models of communications and behavior that can help you improve relationships with your clients, and become more effective in all areas of your business.

Put simply, NLP is about studying human excellence in all its forms, but not in the sense of putting that excellence on a far-off pedestal, but studying it and learning how to model those things that we would like to be doing.

And, unlike other competitive tools, using NLP is not one of those things that will lose its advantage once it becomes more widely used, forcing you to abandon it and search for the next cutting-edge thing.

NLP strengthens and sharpens your unique strengths and advantages, which no competitor can take away from you.

NLP (Neuro-linguistic Programming) first emerged under that name in the early '70s in the U.S. as a way of examining the thinking and behavioral processes of extremely productive and successful people.

Since that time, it has grown to where it is an international phenomenon used by millions. Its methods and principles are applied in many diverse areas, including sales, marketing, education, therapy, sports, personal development, and more.

A good thing to remember is that NLP is the study of what we already do – our patterns, beliefs, and thinking – so we can focus on and strengthen what does work, and take focus away from the elements that act as (often unconscious) roadblocks and keep us from reaching our potential.

# Beginnings

Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) is the study of how we think and experience our world around us. Obviously, the nature of our brains and consciousness has not become an exact science quite yet, so the main method used by NLP is to form models of how these things work.

The models are then used to create techniques for quickly changing thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors that you may not want or need anymore, or even be aware of.

The two people generally credited with developing NLP are Richard Bandler and John Grinder. Bandler was a psychology student at the University of California at Santa Cruz in 1970, when he joined a group led by Grinder, then an associate professor of linguistics at the school.

The two men became friends and began working together, both influenced by the Family Therapy work of Virginia Satir, Fritz Perls' Gestalt Therapy, and Milton H. Erickson's work. Bandler used his background in mathematics and computers and Grinder used his linguistics knowledge to detect patterns and create models.

Both Bandler and Grinder were impressed with the seemingly magical effect that therapists like Satir and Erickson had on their clients, and wanted to see if they could break it down to a scientific level, so it could be more easily reproduced by anyone.

Other like-minded people joined Bandler and Grinder, and many of the methods that are still used today were developed, including anchoring, calibration, reframing, representational systems, and various personal behavioral change techniques.

Throughout the early 1970s, Bandler and Grinder worked on new ideas and experiments while giving workshops and writing books. *The Structure of Magic*, Volumes I and II, *Patterns of the Hypnotic Techniques of Milton H. Erickson*, Volumes I and II, and *Frogs Into Princes* were all published during the subsequent five years.

Most of these books are mainly addressed to therapists wanting to use NLP in their work, but anyone interested in the subject will find useful information there.

By the early 1980s Bandler and Grinder had each developed their own ideas about NLP and had parted company, each to continue on his own.

Some feel that around this time NLP lost some of its initial creativity and went into a temporary slump, turning into more of a conventional quick-fix New Age therapy, marketed to people with lots of money who wanted instant results.

There was some squabbling among different factions over who “owned” NLP and who promoted the “true” version. As time passed, NLP grew in popularity and developed many different strands, until its present status as a sort of “open source” system, with no central authority or single owner. This anarchic flavor contributes to its creative vitality today.

# Basic Principles of NLP

NLP is about identifying patterns in your thinking, beliefs, and behavior, and learning how to consciously choose which patterns to keep and which ones to change. NLP has helped many people to improve their communication skills and reach their business and personal goals.

The idea behind NLP is to give you a set of tools that you can use to watch yourself so you can operate most effectively. Once you are no longer being pushed around by seemingly invisible forces, your self-confidence and energy will rise, as you feel more in control of your circumstances.

You will always have more available choices in any situation, instead of being restricted to the one or two that your conditioning previously allowed you.

NLP operates on the basic assumption that reality is subjective. That is, instead of assuming that there is an objective, single reality out there that we all participate in, it focuses on how each individual experiences and perceives reality from inside.

Therefore, instead of “facts,” NLP is studying personal beliefs and perceptions.

Each one of us perceives our reality through a huge collection of perceptions, thoughts, and beliefs that have a structure and organization, even if it's too complex for us to easily see it.

This is no different from mainstream psychology, which often looks for the roots of a problem in a patient's childhood, in the belief that there is a connection.

NLP looks at these connections in much more detail, asserting that even the smallest verbal or nonverbal communication or behavior can reveal some of the underlying internal structural processes, and someone who has been trained in observing these signals can work with the subject to change behaviors.

Rather than being a rigid discipline, NLP takes a toolbox approach, feeling free to borrow from an eclectic range of theories and disciplines. Experimentation is encouraged – whatever proves to work with a particular individual is used.

Since we are all different, a cookie cutter, one-size-fits-all approach will be much less effective. As a result, NLP is more of a constantly developing process than a philosophy. It is more concerned with what works than with what is “true.”

# The Map is not the Territory

In neuro-linguistic programming, “neuro” refers to the neural pathways in our brain that send, receive, and store the chemical signals that make up the information that is in our heads.

The “linguistic” part is the actual content of that information that moves along those neural pathways. Even though the word “linguistic” refers to verbal information, non-verbal information is also included here.

And the programming is the ways in which these chemical signals are manipulated to become information that makes sense to us and that we can use.

One common way that the brain might accomplish this would be connecting it to the memory of a prior experience already stored in our brain that seems to be similar.

We build up habits of thought and behavior by quickly linking new events to old ones in our head that appear similar. We then react in the same fashion as we did to the experience stored in our memory.

Unfortunately, that reaction may or may not be appropriate for this new experience, but we have trouble dissociating the link between that stimulus and our automatic reaction.

One way that NLP can help is to become conscious of that link, and to reprogram your reactions to something more appropriate (this time something that you consciously choose).

NLP follows the declarations of Alfred Korzybski and Gregory Bateson that there is no such thing as objective experience. That is, there is no single “out there” reality that we are all swimming in (or if there is, we still each live in our own version of it).

Rather, each individual lives with a set of beliefs and perceptions about reality that they have built up, often unconsciously, over a long period of time.

The phrase “the map is not the territory” was originally coined and made famous by Alfred Korzybski, and warns against the common tendency of people to confuse a representation, abstraction, or reaction to a thing with the thing itself.

For instance, it would be like going into a restaurant and chewing on the menu after looking at the pretty pictures of food printed there. Or more realistically, confusing your emotional negative reaction to a certain person with the actual person.

Learning to consciously distinguish between the actual and the representational helps open up one's understanding.

In NLP, distinguishing the map from the territory is an important guiding principle. As individuals, we do not really have direct access to some kind of objective reality.

Instead, we perceive everything through a heavy filter made up of our beliefs, built up over a long period of time.

Here is NLP co-founder Richard Bandler speaking in 1993, giving a very basic description of his conception of NLP:

You want to become competent at whatever you do. That does not mean to get phobics, who shake in their boots while their blood pressure blows through the roof, to believe, "This is not fear." The object is to get them to stay calm and alert, and to stay in their own lane, and to drive across the bridge, which remains standing.

Ask yourself; "Can we build better?" To build those things we have to be able to suspend whatever belief system we already have. Keep it out of the way... Those things get very, very personal. We're talking about basic beliefs regarding

human capability. Here's the only truth about that. Nobody knows.

Most NLP adherents believe that whatever actions a person takes, they have a positive intention, although they may be completely unaware of what it is.

The assumption is that this behavior makes sense because it is the best choice this person has available at the time, given their beliefs and reality filters.

The whole point of NLP is to create new choices, so a person has some breathing room to try out new and unfamiliar behaviors that might be more productive.

This is similar to what renegade psychiatrist R.D. Laing said, which is that what we normally call symptoms of mental illness are actually very reasonable responses to the sometimes ridiculous and impossible demands that modern life and society often put onto individuals.

Feedback loops are important to NLP, which prefers not to view people as either intrinsic successes or failures, but rather sees successes or failures in communication and learning.

The difference is that these problems can be fairly easily fixed. NLP is open to experimentation, as each individual is unique, and it is not always obvious what tactics will work for a particular person.

Therefore, if something does not apparently “work,” there is no reason to feel bad about it. Something has been learned anyway, and something else can be tried next.

Many people have heard the story of Thomas Edison, most famous for inventing the modern light bulb and a number of other conveniences we take for granted. But Edison “failed” hundreds of times for every “success” he had. He didn’t dwell on what didn’t work, simply learned what he could and tried something different, until it did work.

An important part of NLP is to recognize when you are stuck in some way.

We feel stuck because there doesn’t appear to be any other way of doing something. Therefore, the way out of being stuck is to increase your choices, to develop new alternatives.

This has relevance in systems theory, which posits that the parts of a system that will be able to best adapt to changing circumstances are the parts that will be most successful. It’s not necessarily the

person that exercises the most influence, or the most brute force, but the most flexible.

Basically, in NLP terms, it's more important to change how we experience our reality than it is to change the actual content of our reality.

An important part of NLP is becoming conscious of how we are stuck.

# NLP in Business

In contrast to most mainstream psychotherapy, NLP does not examine people and then decide for them what problems they have, and then decide how they should be “cured.”

Instead, NLP helps people to decide for themselves what their “problems” are, and then tries to help them resolve those problems.

You should be given the respect to decide for yourself what you don’t like about your life, and what you’d like to do about it, if anything.

NLP makes no judgments about the validity of a client’s complaints, nor does it try to invent problems where the client sees none. Any area that a person subjectively decides that they want to change or improve in their life is considered valid and appropriate.

In NLP, the client decides what material might be useful for the therapist to hear. The diagnosis determines what the treatment will be, but every step along the way is open to be steered off in a different direction if that seems to be more helpful for the client’s situation.

In NLP, the patient has all the power in the transaction (or should have, if it is being done properly). The client also decides whether the “treatment” has worked or not, or whether another tack should be tried. This actually makes sense, since even in mainstream therapy, more often than not it’s the client who makes the initial decision that there is a problem severe enough that therapy is needed.

Actually, NLP shies away from traditional psychiatric terms like “illness” and “cure.” The idea is more to recognize unproductive patterns, and consciously re-pattern them.

You most likely already have all the skills you need to solve whatever problems are bothering you in your life. The obstacle is that the skills needed to solve that particular problem may be stored in a neural network in your brain that currently has no direct connections established to the neural network that produces the problem.

NLP tries to create new brain pathways so that you can more easily access those problem-solving skills that you didn’t know you had.

In business, you face challenges every day. NLP can help you face those challenges more effectively in your business, as in the rest of your life.

(If you're more happy and effective in the rest of your life, this will automatically spill over and positively affect your business – and vice versa.)

When Bandler and Grinder first started developing NLP, they were fascinated that, given a group of people all with similar education, background, and values, there would be a huge variance in how happy, productive, and effective each person was.

They decided to take the top producers, the most effective performers, and study them to see if they could discover exactly what they were doing differently.

If there was something that could be isolated and quantified somehow, then perhaps they could learn to duplicate that behavior and be just as competent and effective. This is generally referred to as “modeling.”

First they looked at the seemingly obvious factors such as education and personality traits. Then they determined that the way that a person communicates holds the key – verbal language and nonverbal body language.

They theorized that if your brain could learn the communication patterns and behaviors that the most successful people use, then you could successfully imitate their successful behaviors.

Obviously, our five senses are the main avenues by which we receive information from the outside world. As we first develop as babies, we learn to use our senses through a combination of heredity and environment.

As we grow up, we automatically catalog each new experience, first attempting to match it to a previous experience, and then storing it as something apparently new (to us, anyway). The way we store this sense-information in our brains becomes our version of reality.

Once this reality becomes information stored in our brains somewhere, each person has a tendency to recall it using one of his or her favorite senses: touch, sight, or sound. The pictures in our heads are symbolic information, but when recalling it we use our senses to make it more real.

We can see it in pictures, feel it kinesthetically, or hear it as sounds. You can tell which sense you resonate with the most by the words you use to describe the information pulled out of our brain.

For example, you could say roughly the same thing in these different ways:

- If you're kinesthetic, you might say, "I am out of step."
- If you're visual, you might say, "I don't see what you mean."
- If you're auditory, you might say, "It doesn't sound good to me."

If two people are trying to communicate but are using different dominant senses, they might not understand each other as well as they might. For instance, your boss might tell you to "jump on it" (kinesthetic).

You might say, "I'll take a look at it" (visual). Your boss might feel that you don't understand the urgency of the matter that he was trying to convey to you. If instead you had responded with a kinesthetic reply along the lines of "I'll get moving," he would more likely feel that he had communicated effectively with you.

If you have a boss, co-workers, and/or subordinates, pay attention to the types of words and images that they use when they are talking to you. Do they prefer pictures, words, or sports clichés?

When you're talking to co-workers, bosses, spouses, or potential customers – or anyone, for that matter – try speaking to them in the

same dominant style (auditory, visual, kinesthetic) that they are using.

Of course, don't make the mistake of simply assigning a single category to everybody, since no one is exclusively visual, auditory, or kinesthetic. People may prefer different modes for different situations.

You may meet someone for the first time, listen to his or her style, and assign a particular style of communication to them. But if you meet them again, be careful not to stick a label on them without thinking. Actively listen to them each time, and then respond appropriately.

When people are making a decision about whether to buy something or not, they generally use the visual, auditory, and kinesthetic senses to make their decision. And more than likely, one of those senses dominates the others.

If you're the one selling to them, and you can figure out which one it is, you can build an empathy and rapport that could prove important to your sale.

To reiterate, the basic idea of NLP is to identify which patterns highly successful people are using to become successful, and then figure out how you can mimic those patterns yourself.

This means that you may need to force yourself to disregard certain things that you currently hold to be sacred business truths. If the successful person you're modeling does or believes things that go against what you believe, you may have to decide which belief to discard.

If you're trying to earn money in a specific type of business, then you model the successful people in that type of business.

If your problem is that you aren't making enough money at what you're doing, simply sitting back and believing in the natural abundance of the universe isn't going to make you rich.

While the universe IS naturally abundant, you still have to go out and model the successful people in your business that are making good money, and do what they're doing.

# Know What You Want

You can have anything you want, but you must be clear and precise about what that is. If you ask the Universe for something but are vague about what you want, it will say, “Well, if you don’t know, I certainly don’t either.”

People who are really successful got where they are because they had goals. But in order to achieve those goals, they had to have a reason. And not just any reason. It had to be something that so drove them that they had the power to get past any and all obstacles in their way.

With a strong enough reason, the motivation to act will follow naturally.

To achieve your goals in business, you must be channeling all of your energy with a laser-like focus.

Don’t set goals that are so far away as to be essentially out of reach – you’ll only get discouraged and lose whatever momentum you have. But at the same time, a goal must be something of a challenge to be worthwhile and to help you grow.

Ideally, a goal should reach just a little ways beyond your comfort zone – something more than you've previously achieved, but not such a stretch that it seems ridiculously unrealistic.

Use your senses to get feedback for how you are doing. Stay in the present moment and look at what is actually going on around you, not what you'd like to be happening, or whatever is happening in your daydream.

Stay flexible – the more options you have for action, the more chances you have to succeed. As mentioned before, you can't keep doing what you've always done and expect different results. Keep yourself flexible and always changing until you find what works.

As you learn more about NLP and start using its principles on a regular basis, you'll begin to look at things more holistically – that is, you can view individual elements as part of the larger system they're in.

A system typically involves various people and a combination of events, thoughts, actions, and feelings, working to some degree of either good or bad.

If you can view the big picture, you can see how a particular system is working, either for you or against you, and you can take the appropriate action.

One thing about modeling is that you don't spend too much time consciously thinking about what you "should" be doing. Too much thinking sets up barriers that may interfere with the process.

In non-business settings, it may be better not to be too specific about the changes you're after, since your unconscious mind may know better than you do.

Of course, as discussed earlier, if it's a business-related goal, then you will want to be as specific as possible! But any positive changes you make in areas of your life outside business will inevitably spill over and positively affect your business workings.

# Anchoring

Anchoring is probably one of the best-known NLP terms, and a very useful technique originally developed by Bandler and Grinder. It's a way of tapping into the powerful unconscious desires of other people to elicit the response you're trying to get.

Anchoring works by associating a memory or feeling with something else – that is, you're anchoring the two together. For instance, when you think of something fun you did often when you were a child, feelings of pleasure come to you. Those feelings are anchored to that memory.

Anchoring, in the NLP sense, is going on inside and outside us all the time. Most of the time we are not aware that it is happening, which makes it all that much more powerful over us.

Becoming aware of your anchoring allows you to consciously decide which anchors you want to keep and which ones you want to remove or modify.

Novelists and filmmakers consciously use anchoring. Think back to your favorite movie and how cues like music, lighting, action, and suspense produced various psychological states in you as you watched.

When you heard the signature music in “Jaws” that signaled the shark’s approach, how did you react? A little nervous, perhaps? Did you even need to actually see the shark on the screen for these reactions to take place?

In the same way that the shark’s theme music is used over and over in the film to keep stimulating the same response, many pieces of music and literature also use recurring themes for the same purpose.

When dealing with other people, we often use anchoring without realizing it. The outcome of these encounters often is a result of the anchoring that takes place among the participating parties, so it would be helpful to become conscious of what is happening.

When we build up a strong emotional association with another person, we tend to re-enact that emotion automatically and unconsciously whenever we are in their presence.

NLP techniques can help you become aware of the reactions that you are anchoring in other people and in ourselves. Once you know this, you can control the anchoring so that it best serves you and your goals.

## **Anchoring in Business**

When you're in any kind of a communication transaction with another person, whether it's trying to sell to a client or communicate with your boss, a friend, or your spouse, the process for getting the type of response you want is pretty straightforward.

Simply ask the other person to remember some past experience that you know will bring out the type of response you're looking for. For instance, if you want a pleasure response, ask him or her to recall a memory or activity that was enjoyable.

This makes the other person more receptive to the ideas you are communicating. It's not hard to see that when you're trying to sell something, your customer is going to be easier to sell to if they are in certain states of mind.

Learning to use anchoring effectively takes time and practice. You can practice by anchoring various good feelings on yourself, as well as family, friends, and business associates.

Besides making everyone feel good, practicing like this will help you to get used to anchoring, and eventually make it easier for you to do it unconsciously.

Ultimately, you will learn how to anchor appropriate responses without even thinking about it. This will make you something of a

natural-born salesperson, besides making you and the people around you happier in general.

Many organizations and corporations in the U.S. and other countries have used NLP to improve their effectiveness.

The uses of NLP in the corporate world range from coaching executives to improving customer service. In fact, NLP techniques can be helpful in any situation where two or more people must communicate.

Well-known companies that have used NLP include Diner's Club, Fiat, BMW, and American Express.

## **When Your Energy is Low**

Finally, here is a quick visualization exercise you can perform when you suddenly find yourself feeling negative and critical about yourself, and nothing seems to be working.

If you practice this on a regular basis, it will stop the negative images immediately, and keep them from spiraling out of control into a permanent condition.

First, begin by visualizing yourself as if you were standing or sitting outside yourself. As if you were right next to yourself, watching as you sat at the computer.

Make it detailed – see the color of the shirt you’re wearing, the color of your hair, your posture, the look on your face.

Ignore any “flaws” in yourself that you might normally see. Relax and feel serene as you look at yourself.

Play with the image a bit, perhaps putting a soundtrack of a song you like in the background (in your mind, that is), maybe changing some of the colors.

Make it a very pleasant scene. See yourself quietly smiling. Only see your perceived positive traits, and ignore the negative ones.

Go ahead and exaggerate your positive side. In daily life, you likely find flaws in yourself and magnify them out of all proportion in your head. Now do the same thing with your positive traits. Blow them out of all proportion and focus on them. Just go with the flow and play with the image until you are as good as it gets.

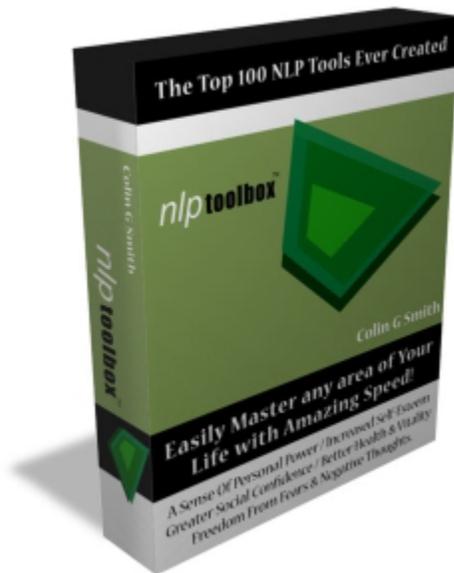
Now compare your current picture of yourself with the first image you made at the beginning of this exercise. Make the final image more powerful.

What are the differences in the way you're feeling now, compared to when you started? Keep the new, final image as the one you'd like to see yourself as.

Practice and play around with this exercise whenever you get the chance, or whenever you're feeling especially heavy and want to lighten up a bit. It's a simple but useful way to make yourself feel better.

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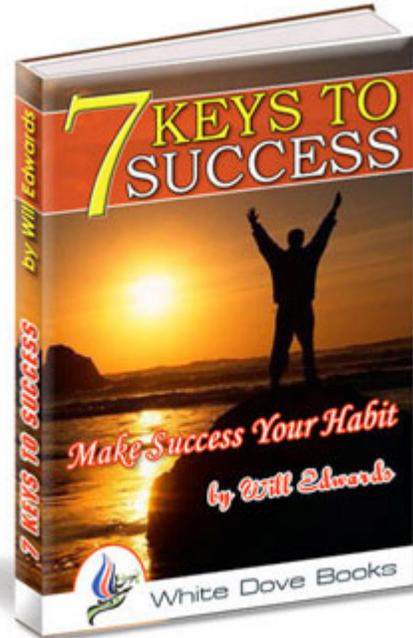
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Will Edwards is the founder of [White Dove Books](#) - the internet's leading website for Self Improvement and Personal Development. A graduate of the University of Birmingham, he develops and teaches Personal Development workshops and is a published author.

Within its first three years, White Dove Books was recognised as one of the internet's leading sites for self help and personal development; breaking into the top 100,000 sites on the internet at the end of 2005.

The INSPIRATION newsletter was started in 2005 as a way of providing helpful information including tips, articles and free inspirational eBooks to our visitors.

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