

## Life's Paradox

uncommon reflections of life matters

# The Magic of Outcome Planning

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Imagine yourself in your ideal working environment. Systems are in place running the business like a well-oiled machine. The equipment and technology is state-of-the-art in a setting that simply inspires you. You are in the office for three days of the week – doing only the business and technical procedures you enjoy. Your clearly defined business vision is shared by your team who continuously work in harmony to realize it. Your team members are top performers in their field who are hand-picked to challenge and support you towards your objectives. The clients you and your team look forward to serving continue to advocate your esteemed products and services to even more colleagues and business associates like themselves. You have achieved all this in a realistic time frame of 12 months.

What's more – you find time to have an amazing family life where your partner and children co-create a Life Vision that is aligned to your core values and respecting each one's Life Purpose to actualize a joyful partnership of shared learning as we mirror and reflect on each other's actions on our life's journey.

Is this all but a dream? Yes it can remain so, if you leave it floating in the recesses of your mind without any tangible action. However, it can also be realized if you follow a series of simple steps.

Using Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) and Neuro Semantics (NS), we will explore how clarifying well-formed outcomes can lead to the formulation of a practical action plan to help us get what we desire by design.

NLP tools provide soft skills to help run, manage or lead you and your business to where you want to go. NLP can be summed up as a cognitive behavioural science of excellence modelling top performers of any field as a transferable skill. NLP originated in the USA in the mid-1970's when foundational developers John Grinder and Richard Bandler modelled outstanding communicators. These methodologies can be applied to running our business, enhancing the delivery of our products and services whilst managing our daily lives.

NS was developed by Dr L. Michael Hall as an expansion of the foundation models of NLP to help us make meaning of our performance in life. The maps and meanings by which we structure our individual worlds can either hold us back or unleash our highest potentials. Based on Self-Actualizing technology, NS helps us set our highest frames of minds to be the best we can be.

## Goals vs Outcomes

You may be a person who has set goals all your life. Still, you have inconsistent results. Some goals you reach, and some you don't. So why is it so? The reason lies in the fact that goals may be different from outcomes.

Here's an example. When we play basketball, the *goal* of the game is to shoot more balls into the basket than the other team in the allotted time. However, the *outcome* of the game may actually be different for every basketball player. For instance, some may have the outcome to win, some may be playing just to have a good time, others may be there to get some exercise, another may be playing to entertain, some to score for a personal best, another plays because it's a job. Aligning members of each team to the one common outcome could be useful so everyone plays for the same reason or motivation.

What happens in business? The *goal* of a business is to stay in business. The *outcome* of each business may be different – one possible outcome could be to continually increase the % of profits annually, another could be to provide an environment to stimulate innovation to set the benchmarks in the industry, yet another could be for non-profit with the objective of simply providing a service to the community.

Does your family set goals as a group? Perhaps we may want a *goal* for a family that remains close regardless of what happens. The *outcome* of one family may be to reside



in the same geographical location to physically support each other. Yet another may stay close through competing and challenging each other to extraordinary achievement. Another clan may stick together for tribal support while being hostile to the rest of the world.

## Clarifying Well-formed Outcomes

Outcomes can certainly help us achieve our goals. We will get what we want when we are totally clear of what we want. Our purpose or intention underlying the outcome must also be satisfied. Concrete practical steps then emerge to complete a well-formed Outcome Planning.

In well-formed Outcome Planning, there are distinctly four questions you need to address.

1. What do you want? (Desired Outcome)
2. Why do you want it? (For what purpose)
3. What prevents you from getting it? (Blocks and stops)
4. What are the actions you need to take? (Action Plan)

## Desired Outcome

What do you want? Many people are not aware of what they want. So if you are in that frame of mind, it may be useful to start with what you don't want, and mould an outcome from that. Remember that outcomes can be changed. So if you are not absolutely sure of what you want, it is useful to have a direction to move in and adjust from there.

You may notice that when you start stating what you want, it is often expressed in “fluff” language which is vague, generalized and often unclear. Some examples of “fluff” language when eliciting outcomes include:

I want to be *highly successful* in business and in life.  
My office and my home will be *dynamic, outstanding* and *modern*.  
The people closest to me will be *highly skilled, creative* and *motivated*.

To get a better understanding, we need to clarify the “fluff”: What does “highly successful” mean to you? Is it \$xyz net profit in one year? Is it perhaps a certain percentage increase annually of your gross production? Is it being featured in “Time” or “Fortune” magazine cover? Maybe it is being featured on the Forbes-equivalent of the



Top 100 in your country, or perhaps the world. Could it be simply doing what you love with whom you choose to be with and when you wish to?

We can further “de-fluff” the terms “dynamic”, “outstanding”, “modern”, “highly skilled”, “creative” and “motivated” through a series of quality questions to get to the tangible sensate specifics of what was actually meant by nominating those words.

Let us examine this analogy: You are planning to build a house. The more ideas you can get across to your architect, the higher the likelihood of designing the “right” house for you. If you just say, “Build me a house” – what are the chances that the architect’s thoughts are anywhere near what you have in mind? If you described it in more detail: say, a triple storey stand alone mansion, 6 bedrooms with contemporary built-ins, 4 bathrooms, quadruple lock-up garage, sandstone exterior, airy open plan naturally-lit interiors, using as much natural wood, stone, glass as is possible, a low maintenance garden of local shrubbery, within a ballpark of US\$900,000 to be completed in 10 months....you are starting to get closer to what you intend.

What about a business example. You need to communicate to your direct report that you need certain documentation researched and completed. If you just sent them out of the meeting with “Get the report completed to me as soon as possible”– that is totally open to interpretation by your team member. However, if you specified that “the report has to be on my desk before 5pm this Thursday, typed double spaced with font size 12 in Times Roman on a minimum of 10 sheets of A4 size white paper, bound with attached graphics on CD-ROM, whilst honouring the known budget and manpower constraints of the project”.... the chances of getting what you want is much greater.

What do you want? It is important to start with the “big picture” (usually “fluff”) and work down to the details. The more specific, tangible and concrete your details, the more likely you will achieve the Desired Outcome. It is a good idea to set a time line and some benchmarks for key performance indicators (KPIs) in setting out the details.

How will you know when you have realized your Desired Outcome? What will you *see*? How will you *feel*? What will you *hear*? Can you really define the sweet *smell* of success and the *taste* of achievement? It is vital to define an end point.

In the example about the house, your KPIs for your Desired Outcome may involve the following:

*I see myself and my family moving into the house and we feel so excited as if it was a dream come true as we touch the walls, see the brightness and colours of the interior exactly as we expected in all the rooms, hear the exclamations of delight of every member of the family and the bubbling of the water fountain in*

*the garden, and **smell** the fragrance of the gardenias blooming mixed with the aroma of the fresh-mown lawn, as we sit down to **taste** the first barbecue in the backyard.*

So often people can keep working towards something and not even realize when they have arrived! Make sure you can make a movie in your mind of that Desired Outcome and relate it as a story so somebody else can clearly experience it like you said!

## For what purpose

This is the ultimate reason or motivation that will drive you to obtain the Desired Outcome. It is important to become conscious of why you want what you want. If the outcome is not self determined, is based on someone else's success or is driven by external factors rather than a reason for yourself, it is possible that you can become demotivated or disinterested and thus lose the drive to achieve and complete the outcome.

For instance in the context of running your business, your Desired Outcome is to be the celebrity business systems multimedia expert and to position yourself as *the* authority in the public's eye in that respect. (Assume that this Desired Outcome has been de-fluffed.) For what purpose? Because you want to inspire the public that once systems are in place, anybody can do business successfully. Why do you wish to inspire the public in this manner? Because it gives you satisfaction. What does satisfaction give you? A sense of fulfillment. What does fulfillment give you? You feel you are doing what you really want to do. So, ultimately in this example – it is the fulfillment of doing what you want to do is your purpose.

The aim is for you to get to the bottom of what you think really drives you to get your Desired Outcome. It has to be compelling for You and nobody else. Without the energy of that compelling purpose, the Desired Outcome becomes harder to achieve.

## Blocks and Stops

If you are so clear of what you want, why haven't you got it yet?

A useful contrast is to paint an honest picture of where you are right now (Present Situation) and compare it to where you want to go (Desired Outcome). Analysing the difference or gap between the two scenarios will give you a good indication of what may be preventing or blocking you from getting your Desired Outcome.



## The Gap Analysis

Think of all the possible blocks, resistance or obstacles that have or may come up which could stop you manifesting your Desired Outcome. It may be quite useful to get other perspectives from trusted friends or colleagues with this one. A professional personal coach is not a far fetched idea at this point, if one is inclined that way.

Sometimes we have beliefs, family conditioning, environmental conditions that flavour our thoughts, beliefs and behaviour. When we become aware of them, we are able to make more conscious choices as to what we want to do about them. Think about what beliefs or values which may sabotage or support you towards realizing your Desired Outcome. Some common beliefs that hold us back may include: “I am too old to learn new skills” or “I am too young to set up my own business” or “I cannot do this because I do not have a University degree”.....Being aware is the first step. Then it’s working out how to deal with these.

Project yourself into the future and assess whether there are any implications that may occur, that need to be factored in now. What can come up is say, blindness to travel requirements, time away from family, pressure, reactions of others, need time and effort to upskill. When these implications are discussed, the decisions and choices can be made more clearly.

What about the resources that you may require to obtain your Desired Outcome? Do you possess them already? Or do you need to seek them out? Get this as clear and precise as possible. “De-fluff” your thoughts on the best resources. For instance, you may say “I need a mentor”. Ask: With what qualities? How would you like them to mentor you? Do you have someone in mind? How can you engage them as your mentor? Do you want it as a formal or informal process?

This is a process of “Calling out the Ghosts”. When you exorcise them and they are out in the open light, they are no longer scary. Like dragons in myths, if we can call them by name, we can tame them. So get a handle of your fears and name those things that have previously been a barrier to your Desired Outcome, and notice how they are more easily surmountable than you have thought.

## Formulating the Action Plan

What are the steps that can be taken? Often we fall into the trap of making the first step too large and never get started. Be sure to chunk them into sizes that are easy to accomplish.



For the practical Action Plan to emerge, you may need to address the following:

- What are you prepared to do?
- In what time frame?
- To what standard?
- What is the evidence procedure (KPIs again!) that this action is working?
- How do you hold yourself accountable to follow through?
- Do you need an “external” person to coach you through it or follow you up?
- Are there any priorities to this Action Plan?
- What is the first step?

*“Every thousand mile journey begins with the first step.” Chinese proverb*

### Applications in other contexts

By now, you are probably aware that Outcome Planning does not just mean Strategic Planning for your business.

The next time you are designing a customized service plan for your client, why not consider going through the steps in well-formed Outcome Planning?

1. **Desired outcome:** Work out what you and your client mutually desire. De-fluff the details to get to the most tangible specifics (eg what specifically does “good quality service” mean?)
2. **For what common purpose** will the provision of the service be driven
3. Do a gap analysis to show up the **blocks and stops** – work out thoughts, beliefs and behaviours that may not be supporting them. Define some resources (eg extended payment plan, after hours service, ways to manage unforeseen issues as they come up) that will best serve the client.
4. Formulate the **action plan** - which is essentially the Service Plan

Outcome Planning can also be useful during Development Conferences (a.k.a Performance Reviews) for team members in your business. You can counsel them through the same process:

1. **Desired outcome:** What do they really want (remember to “de-fluff”) at work or in their career path. Get concrete details: with time lines, performance indicators. How will they know when they get the outcome?
2. **For what purpose** do they really want it. Make sure it is truly for themselves
3. **Blocks and stops:** Elicit their Present Situation and discuss what may prevent or block their outcome. Be aware of any sabotaging behaviours or beliefs, and to help them discover resources to support them (eg. Books, courses, increasing responsibilities, upskilling, engaging a coach)
4. Work out the best **action plan** to chart their desired career trajectory. Chunk for success. What is the first step?

What about your personal life?

Imagine how you could do Outcome Planning in your own career.

1. **Desired outcome:** Where do you really want to be doing x years from now? Define how your place of work is and where specifically. What exactly is the nature of your contribution? How many days in the year are you working? What and how are you remunerated?
2. **For what purpose:** Why do you want this? Be totally honest of what will give you maximum satisfaction
3. **Blocks and stops:** Define your Present Situation and compare with your Desired outcome. What’s stopping you? Is there trusted friends and family who can help you get more perspective here? What resources will best serve you? Do you need a career planning professional?
4. **Action plan:** Are you doing anything now to get there? If so, what is your first step?

What about working on your wealth creation?

1. **Desired outcome:** How much do you want to have invested? Is your portfolio in stocks, bonds, shares, real estate, fixed deposit? Local or international? What is the growth you project? Over what time frame? How do you know when you have arrived?
2. **For what purpose** are you doing all this?
3. **Blocks and stops:** What are the obstacles? How do you follow this through? Do you need further resources (eg books, training, professional consultation, mentors, a wealth coach)?
4. What is your **action plan** – strategies for short term, midterm and long term?

Have you also considered working out what you really want in your health - intellectually, emotionally, physically, spiritually? Do you have an outcome plan for your



recreation? Have you clearly enunciated what you desire in your relationships –spouse, children, family, friends, social, colleagues, business network?

When coaching my executive and professional clients, I have certainly found that whilst I was hired to develop their career or enhance performance at work, ultimately it is the personal issues of the home and family that form the breakthrough areas in our coaching relationship. We do not leave our family values at home when we get to work. So have you thought about Outcome Planning your Family Vision?

You are probably now realizing the impact of NLP and NS applications in all areas of your life. The more you are conscious of clarifying what you want and how you deal with it in different contexts from day to day, the more you will notice the transformation in your self leadership of being who you are when relating to colleagues, business associates, team members, clients, acquaintances, friends, family and all those meaningful people in both your personal and professional life. Enjoy. I know your life will never be the same again.

That is the magic of outcome planning.

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