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Life's Paradox
Uncommon reflections of life matters

The Magic of Personality Filters

By Dr Yvonne Sum, BDS Hons, NLPTT, ACMC
International Speaker & Personal Coach

I recall a business seminar presenter in the late 1990s saying this is how we spend our time: 33% sleeping, 20% watching TV, 13% on recreational activities and 34% working. In fact, I dare say that for most of us, between 34-50% of our lives is spent on the latter. The sad thing is, we usually cannot pick who we work with – whether colleagues, business associates or clients. So when it comes to building relationships in these circumstances, wouldn't it be nice if we enjoy working together all the time. Realistically, we know that is impossible.

Ever wondered why there are some people you get along well with most of the time? And then there are those who always rub you up the wrong way? How would it be like to have an awareness of why this is, so we can be less emotionally charged about those that we have to work or live with who regularly push our buttons? How would it be like to turn these types of situations around?

In the first article of this series, **The Magic of NLP**, Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) was introduced as a soft skills tool to help run, manage or lead you and your business to where you want to go. NLP can be summed up as a behavioural science of excellence modeling top performers of any field as a transferable skill. NLP originated in the USA in the mid-1970s when John Grinder and Richard Bandler modeled outstanding communicators. These methodologies can be applied to business and our daily professional and personal lives.

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In a previous article *The Magic of Rapport*, building rapport was discussed. Rapport is essentially about constructing an invisible bridge to enhance relationships through reducing differences at an unconscious level. It is about stepping into the shoes of the other person and joining their model of the world. When you do, you can truly appreciate how they do see the world quite uniquely.

Each of us has such a unique experience of the world because we process the world through a certain set of filters. In fact over 300 filters have been documented and described. No one set of these so-called "Personality Filters" is the same. When clashes consistently exist between two people, that is a sure sign they are on opposite extremes of the continuum with regard to their Personality Filters.

Remember that in fair weather, we can be tolerant of people we do not get along with. However, under crisis we default to our Personality Filters. This is when the dramas happen. How would it be like to become aware of these filters so the sparks fly less?

What are *Personality Filters*?

The study of *Personality Filters* moves far beyond all the models and instruments that try to figure people out by classifying them according to types and temperaments. Since the early Greeks with their model of the "Four Basic Temperaments" they call humours, hundreds of modes of personality typing have arisen. Many people assume that people walk around with permanent traits inside of them and that explains *why they are like they are*.

NLP practitioners do not go by the assumption that people have permanent traits. We have opted for another assumption, whereby we look at how people function, and how they perceive or 'filter' the world to support their preferred approaches.

Personality Filters is the study of how people filter information from the external world, from their experiences, from input from other people, and how they take information internally and process it, and make meaning from it.

This study orientates itself around the subject being the point of inquiry, and not the theoretical model. What this means is that the person's behaviour is observed and understood in terms of their behaviour, rather than trying to fit their behaviour into a particular model.

The Personality Filters act as if they are a sieve of our experiences, or external reality. They determine what information passes through, based on what we are looking for, or

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where we have put our attention. Our Personality Filters are generally unconscious, however when you become aware of them they are clearly conscious and obvious.

Just because something is presented in a certain way does not mean that it is going to be perceived the same way by others. Let's do an exercise. Look around the room. Notice as many items that are red. Close your eyes. Now try and recall as many articles that are green. What did you notice? It is interesting how we filter information, isn't it?

There are no two profiles of Personality Filters that are identical. Just as people are diverse and changeable, so are the filters through which they view their world. Although profiles are not the same, it is possible to recognize patterns of Personality Filters that predispose a person to a particular behaviour, or set of behaviours.

Personality Filters are not conscious choices of how we filter information. The Personality Filters develop and function at an unconscious level. They develop over time from experience, role models, innate qualities, training and behavioural reinforcement. We are not generally aware of how we think, or make meaning. It seems that it is just our natural way of thinking. There is often an unspoken expectation that others 'should' think or make meaning in the same way as we do. When we understand the different Personality Filters, it gives us a strong foundation to understand how we think as well as understanding other people better.

Let's explore some examples.

Making Meaning: Sensate vs Intuitor

Imagine you are thinking of investing in new technology (there are always new gadgets to play in this day and age!) Say, the latest state-of-the-art SKYPE-compatible audiovideo-cam internet communications system. What information you require and how you make sense of it will determine which Filter you default to.

Do you rely on information that is concrete – that which you can see, hear, feel, taste or smell? For example, you need to have the sales rep give you a thorough demonstration. In fact you will like to trial it for several days to make sure you have a handle on it. How long has it been in the market place? You require some convincing studies & trials on it. If that sounds like you, you are more *Sensate* in making meaning.

What if you rely on ideas, thoughts, theories and more abstract information to create meaning of a situation? For instance, the concept of SKYPE alone is enough for you to make intuitive leaps and connections of how you will improve your global communications ability to liaise with your business associates more efficiently and

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economically and hence service your clients better and more effectively – you will just go with the system that promises the most possibilities. If that approach is most agreeable to you, then you are likely more of an *Intuitor*.

Remember it is neither better to be a sensate nor an intuitor. Both come with benefits and disadvantages. Sensates can be very practical and grounded in reality. They ask obvious questions, tending to call a spade a spade. They can have difficulties generalizing what they have learnt and translating new information or ideas into different contexts in life.

Intuitors are good with new ideas, policies and theories – making links and connections so ideas are relevant and relate to the particular situation – but only in their heads. They can find it difficult to deliver sensate examples and translate theories into application.

Intuitors drive Sensates crazy because they have such lofty ideas with little obvious concrete applications. Sensates drive the Intuitors batty because they seem to firehose every new idea. For example, an Intuitor on our team had a proposal to market several great ideas to our clients through value-added service. Well, the Sensates really got stuck into: "How are we going to measure or track the success of this project?" "How much lead time do we have?" "When will we see results?" "How do we define value for every person?" Similarly at your staff meetings, it may be just a matter of filters when an idea is being critiqued! So don't take it personally.

Time Processing: Thru Time vs In Time

Have you ever attended a meeting where somebody can keep carrying on about a single point with no regard for the fact that there are still 10 items on the agenda and only 30 minutes to go? On the other hand, there is the person who so stresses about running 60 seconds overtime re a specific item on the agenda– one wonders whether our time-Nazi has a life at all!

If you can relate more to the former, you default to an *In Time* filter. You have no awareness of time passing, or how much time there is to go. Literally, you are immersed in present time. Positive: Focused in the now where people feel you are really present in the moment, and able to enjoy/problem solve there and then. Negative: May get lost in the moment that leads to poor time management.

If the latter example sounds like you, then you process *Thru Time*. You have an internal measurement system that lets you know what time has elapsed and how much time is left. Often you can tell what time it is at any time of the day. Positive: Planning your day, monitoring time spent with people, getting to appointments on time. Negative: You may

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not appear to be 'present' and focused, and may not enjoy what is happening now because of thinking or planning what is coming up next.

In Time people can never understand why Thru Timers fuss so much about what is about to happen – "Learn to be here now to smell the roses" is the former's advice. Thru Time people irritated by the In Timers' lack of time consciousness are thinking impatiently: "Get on with it already".

Within any business, be aware of clients your In Time professional/executive/agent attracts. They love to weave a good yarn. They do not mind waiting. In fact, often you have to work hard to get them in on schedule. When a Thru Time employee covers for the In Time boss, make sure s/he is thoroughly briefed! The reverse is also true for In Timer covering for the Thru Timer.

No prizes for guessing what it is like to be an In Timer with a Thru time spouse … and vice-versa!! Imagine what it is like to get to an event "on time". For a 7.00 pm start, 7.01 pm is deemed late by the Thru timer. At 7.30 pm, the In Timer still considers that on time!!

Work Preference:Task vs Maintenance

Are you likely to focus on the task, of getting the job done and not too concerned about the people around and their feelings? For instance, if you are trying to meet a deadline to finish a project, you may demand that your team members stay late every night until the task is completed. You will not entertain any exceptions.

In contrast, is it more likely that you concentrate on making sure the people feel good whilst the task is getting done? An example using the same scenario above, you are likely to request for an extension of the deadline whilst trying to enthuse and empower the team to get the job done. Any problems encountered by each member are dealt with individually. The task may still not be completed by the new deadline if the team is not happy.

If you are strongly *Task* focused, people may get crushed in the rush to complete the task. Orders may be snapped, people ordered about, and you end up neglecting to recognize the needs of your team members. All these can lead to a very unhappy and unappreciated team. Positive: Able to get job done, will follow through and look for completion. Negative: People can feel unimportant.

The *Maintenance* filter maintains the people within an environment. Positive: People can feel valued and belonged to the team. Negative: The task may be delayed or even not

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done if people are not harmonizing. Time and budget can blow out spending time maintaining the team.

Task people are perceived as cold and calculating. Maintenance people are accused of being too wishy-washy or warm-and-fuzzy. A great way to balance a team out is to get Task and Maintenance people to work together so they can learn from each other. Make sure there is a facilitator/mediator for the process!

So What?

Just by comparing the extremes on three continuums of Personality Filters above, you may be aware of a pattern emerging: When we notice extremely opposite opinions with another, it is essentially the behaviour resulting from how different each party filters the world that pushes one another's buttons.

A useful application in recruiting and coaching employees using Personality Filters is that there is now the tendency to hire and put people who are very different from each other in the same team. Why? Because differences mean complementary strengths. If we recruit people who are just like us, the team stagnates in development. Strengths are not augmented. The business does not grow. Recruiting for difference can bring out difficulties in interpersonal communications. (Be aware of the bumpy ride!) The benefit of having differences in strengths and weaknesses on the team is that it challenges and increases the potential of the team.

So the next time you feel misunderstood, or that other person really gets your goat, just know this: You are both perceiving the world through very different filters. The fact that you are still choosing to interact despite the friction shows you have a common goal, ideal or intent. (Or else you are simply sado-masochistic!)

People really are not their behaviours. When you understand that, you can learn to modify your filters. Notice how developing your range and flexibility within your filters can affect your relationships.

Imagine how you can use this awareness not just in business, but with your spouse, children, family and friends. The next time a potential conflict looms, consider whether it is from the effect of looking through very different personality filters.

The more you become aware of your own filters and that of others, the more you will be less reactive to the responses of others. Notice how this seemingly simple adaptation in thinking can have such significant changes in how you are at work and at home. Life really can be so much easier. It is about making (useful) meaning in our minds.

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And that is the magic of being awake to the power of Personality Filters.

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About the Author: Dr Yvonne Sum is a pioneer in Parent Leadership coaching. She is on a quest to co-create joyful learning partnerships between parents and children to simultaneously bring out each other's authentic best. She inspires parents to learn from our children mirroring to us what we most need to learn about ourselves and vice-versa. Through her series of *Transformational Leadership Challenge™ (TLC)* programs, Dr Sum is committed to transform leaders of tomorrow today by highlighting family values and celebrating parents as role models and heroes in life who proactively unleash our children's potential through self actualization, intentional living and powerful leadership centred on love and high purpose. She expresses this passion to bring out our authentic best through her roles as an international speaker, writer, transformational corporate facilitator, executive and parent Meta-Coach, Neuro Linguistic Programming trainer, business woman, wife and mother. Please visit **www.dryvonnesum.com** for more information.

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