

Presuppositions

Enhancing Performance and Perspective

Activity Summary

An interactive, small-group activity providing participants with the tools to reframe their perceptions, leading to improved outlook and productivity.

Goals

- To learn about and understand NLP (neurolinguistic programming).
- To apply NLP to enhancing one's work life and relationships.
- To develop the ability to choose positive responses to events.

Group Size

Any size group in teams of 3 to 6 persons each.

Time Required

65 minutes.

Materials

- One Presuppositions Handout per participant.
- One Presuppositions Recommended Readings per participant.
- Blank paper and a pen for each participant.
- Flip chart with felt-tipped markers.

Physical Setting

A space large enough for teams to work seated in groups of 3 to 6, ideally around tables.

Facilitating Risk Rating

Moderate.

Process

1. Introduce the session by explaining that participants will be applying neuro-linguistic programming-based presuppositions to enhance their work lives and perceptions. Break the group into smaller teams of 3 to 6 at tables.
2. Distribute copies of the Presuppositions Handout, blank paper, and pens to participants. Ask each table group to spend time acquainting themselves with the Presuppositions in a way that each team selects (reading quietly, taking turns reading aloud, or selecting a single reader).

(10 minutes.)

3. When the teams complete that task, field any questions that arise; then reinforce these key points:
 - Presuppositions are not necessarily true. Their value is not in debating “reality” but in deciding to live “as if” they are true and to note the impact they can have on one’s work, effectiveness, and rapport with others.
 - While setting the goal of living as if presuppositions are true may seem simple, it is in fact a challenging endeavor that requires constant attention and commitment. The potential impact can be quite powerful.
 - Each participant will select one presupposition to focus on during the session and over the next two weeks. Encourage everyone to pick one that resonates with him or her and/or one that seems particularly pertinent to a current challenge. If someone wishes to create his or her own presupposition, encourage the person to do so.
4. Assign an additional 15 minutes of group time for participants to individually select presuppositions and then to share the following in teams:

(10 minutes.)

- Why the person picked that particular presupposition.

- How he or she interprets the presupposition.
- How he or she envisions a potential impact from living as if it were true.

Let the group know when half the time has elapsed and again when two minutes remain. Remind them at these intervals to ensure that everyone has a chance to share.

(15 minutes.)

5. After the teams share in their small groups, open up the discussion to the whole room, asking:

- Does anyone wish to share comments or ideas from the smaller teams that may be pertinent to everyone? (Note key points on the flip chart at the front of the room and post if desired.)
- Did team members interpret presuppositions differently? What were some of the differences, and what was the impact of having different interpretations?
- If anyone chose to make up a new presupposition, what was it?
- How can you apply your presupposition to challenging relationships? Crisis management? Dealing with matters outside your control? Task accomplishment? Other applications?
- How have you lived in the past that was counter to the presuppositions you chose? What was the impact? What could you do differently now?
- What assumptions have you made in the past about other people that could change through the lens of a presupposition?

(20 minutes.)

6. Ask participants to each choose an “accountability partner” with whom to check in within the next two weeks. Partners should select a time and means of speaking (in person, by phone, via email) at that time. Their follow-up conversations should include asking each other whether they were able to integrate the presuppositions into their processing of events and the impact it had if so. They may at that time, if they choose, decide with the partner to select second presuppositions and agree to speak again in the future.

7. Lead a concluding discussion that could include some or all of the following questions:

- How could adopting presuppositions into your thinking impact your work life?

- How much control do we have over how we process and respond to external events?
- Why is it important to revisit your presupposition with your accountability partner in two weeks?
- In what ways could you apply what you learned to any challenging work relationships?

(10 minutes.)

8. Remind participants that we can impact our reality through choosing our responses.
9. Conclude by distributing the Presuppositions Recommended Readings for those inspired to learn more about NLP.

Submitted by Devora D. Zack.

Devora D. Zack, president, OCC, specializes in leadership, teams, communication, and change. Her seminars, assessments, and coaching result in lasting change for dozens of clients. Her clients include Deloitte, IRS, AOL, Cornell, DHS, IMF, OPM, and AmeriCorps. She is certified in neurolinguistic programming and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. She holds an MBA from Cornell University and a BA from The University of Pennsylvania. Her company recently won USDA's Woman-Owned Business of the Year award.

Presuppositions Handout

Presuppositions come from neurolinguistic programming, a field of applied psychology that teaches through language, action, and perceptions how to achieve excellence in communication, relationships, and influence.

Presuppositions are not necessarily true. However, they are useful beliefs for effective inter- and intra-personal communication. Choosing to interact *as if they are true* can have a powerful impact on your attitudes toward others and on your own effectiveness. The following presuppositions (assumptions) are made in NLP:

- A. *The meaning of your communication is the response that you have, independent of intention.* By taking responsibility for the “communication loop,” you increase your ability to change your behavior and your reactions to others’ responses.
- B. *There is no such thing as failure, only feedback and results.* “Failure” or “mistakes” are destructive labels. Instead, setbacks can be utilized to achieve a goal by perceiving them as information that was gained or as signals to learn more about a topic. “Failure” is really just information that gives us an opportunity to increase our effectiveness.
- C. *People have the resources to accomplish their goals.* Clarify the underlying intention you have for achieving your goal. Our resources include the abilities, attitudes, and emotions that assist us in achieving what we want. If we lack a resource, we can combine it with others, redefine our need, or assess other ways to obtain the necessary skills.
- D. *The map is not just the territory.* Our understanding and perception of the world create our own maps. These maps allow us to navigate through difficult experiences and rough “terrain”; however, our maps are not objective reflections of the world. As an analogy, a city map is a piece of paper with lines, words, and colors; it is not the city itself. The meaning we assign to our experience is the map; the experience is the territory.
- E. *There’s always another choice.* Every experience can be described in at least three different ways from three different perspectives (first, second, and third person). By changing perspective, you increase your information and alter your perceptions. This increases your possible choices. Even when it is difficult to see, hear, or feel them, there are other options.

Exercise

Select the presupposition above (A through E) (or create your own) that most resonates with you or has the most immediately relevant application to your life. Discuss in your group how your interpretation of the presupposition could lead to an enriching or alternative perspective on a current challenge you are experiencing, on your work life, and/or on your typical interactive style.

Presuppositions Recommended Readings

This list is for participants interested in learning more about neurolinguistic programming. Presuppositions are just one aspect of the diverse and fascinating field of NLP and its offshoot, NeuroSemantics. There are countless volumes on neurolinguistic programming. The items below have been selected because of their quality, accessibility, relevance to the workplace, and ease of application.

Bandler, R., & Grinder, J. (1980). *Reframing: Neurolinguistic programming and the transformation of meaning*. Salt Lake City, UT: Real People Press. (Note: This is the original text in the field of NLP.)

Charvet, S.R. (1997). *Words that change minds*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt.

Knight, S. (1998). *NLP at work*. London, UK: Nicholas Brealey.

O'Connor, J., & Seymour, J. (1990). *Introducing neurolinguistic programming*. San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins.