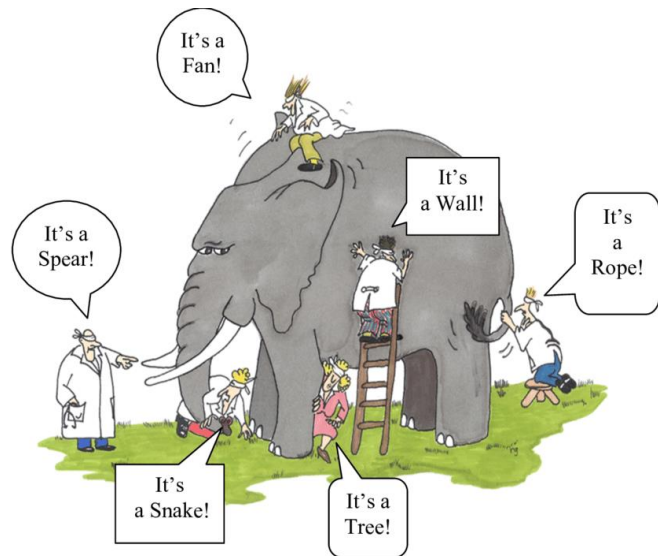


The Map is Not the Territory

What this means to me?

I often refer to this as one of my favorite, if not my most liked, “NLP presuppositions.” I do so because this is where I first encountered this phrase. Soon thereafter, it has become one of my often used phrases in day-to-day living as well as in my work with others.

In NLP, it is one of 13 (I believe) presuppositions. Presuppositions simply refer to central beliefs (or philosophy) subscribed to by NLP practitioners. But this particular phrase does not find its origin in NLP. In fact, it was first used and presented by an individual by the name of Alfred Korzybski (A snippet of this info is included below.) a Polish born American scientist, mathematician, philosopher – who is mainly known for his development of General Semantics.



From this you can gather how and why this is important to NLP since NLP stands for Neuro Linguistic Programming. Semantics is, simply, the study of meanings of words/sentences while linguistic refers to the study of language. So, in a sense – semantics may be seen as a subset of linguistics.

In 1931 Alfred Korzybski gave a presentation at a meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in New Orleans where he used the phrase “the map is not the territory.” Korzybski used this phrase to mean that people in general do not have access to absolute knowledge of reality, but merely possess a subset of that knowledge that is then tinted through the lenses of their own experience. He further added that it is important for people to know that their understanding of things, “the map”, is not a true representation of reality itself or everything represented by reality, or “the territory”.

(Obtained October 2021 from <https://www.solutionsiq.com/resource/blog-post/map-territory-agile-teams-know-difference/>)

Anyway, for me it is a good reminder that we cannot ever be 100% objective. This is because no matter how we try to frame it, we will all see the world through somewhat subjective lenses. Our lenses are tinted (or tainted) by our own personal experiences. Since no one can have an exactly identical life-experience - not even MZ twins (monozygotic or identical twins), therefore we all have some variation in our perception of the world (reality).

So, first things (for me to establish) is that it is “normal” for all of us to have differing views – no matter how great or how small those differences are. This is “natural.”

Second, we therefore do not judge one view is better than another. And therefore we do not “fight” our own or another’s view. My view may be legitimate (real) to me and still not be so for another. However, the reverse is also true. So, one is “real” to another may not necessarily be so to me. In other words, another’s experience may not be consistent with mine and therefore may not “resonate” with me (does not make sense).

Third, if we are able to remain with an open mind and be accepting that there can be other “realities” (or truth) besides my own, I may be able to experience the “truth” of another vicariously. Thereafter, that too may become my experience/belief/truth. My view of the world/universe is then expanded allowing me to see better what I was only able to see from one singular perspective (mine) previously.

In our profession of helping others, it ought to be with the notion of also helping ourselves. It is a continuous cycle of change and exchange. Hence, when I share with a client an experience (a truth) that is peculiar to me – it doesn’t make my truth any more valid than his/hers. It is merely a difference in experience/perception. This is my map – my interpretation.

My client is free to take a look at my map, super impose it onto his/her own map and get – perhaps – an even more detailed map (his/hers & mine combined). And if this new combined map helps him/her deal more effectively (adaptively) to the Territory (terrain) then – mission accomplished. If the client rejects, that’s his/her right to do so. It does not make him/her less than ...

Whether this is in relationship to work or to everyday day-to-day living events – by acknowledging that the Map is Not the Territory – that opens the door to accepting another’s Map as equally “correct.” It’s just a matter of perception (how one views the Territory stemming from one’s experiences.” Acceptance of another’s “truth” or experiences gives me a greater view of life itself – expanding my knowledge of the world around me and an appreciation for the many beautiful facets of life. Seeing that there is another way to view life does not dictate that I must use another’s map though. It only means – if when you overlay another map upon your own and it makes sense, it helps clarify and define, it leads to more adaptive and healthier ways of being – then great. If it does not, you are free to use only your own map or the maps of those who resonate with you.

As always, I can go on endlessly – it would seem – on this as with other matters that are of interest to me. But for NOW – let me just stop here.

Namaste.