

# **“The Presuppositions of Desire (How To Stop Seeking & Start Finding)”**

## **by Jamie Smart**

“What do you want?” This question is typically one of the first ‘pieces’ of NLP a person learns. It acknowledges the goal-seeking nature of human neurology, and is a powerful starting point for communication, changework, and generally making things happen. So powerful, in fact, that having a ‘well-formed outcome’ is virtually mandatory for any NLP-trained individual setting out to create results in their lives. So I have a question: If well-formed outcomes are so great, how come more NLP-meisters (including the author) aren’t slim, rich, enlightened, well-balanced, or at the very least, blissfully happy?

To find the answer to this question, we must look to history. The well-formed outcome is reputed to have come about in the early days of NLP, when it was noted that Lesley Cameron’s therapeutic work seemed to be more robust (i.e. People changed and stayed changed) than that of some of her NLP contemporaries. One of the differences seemed to be ‘Lesley’s questions’, a checklist that she would go through for each person. The checklist has become immortalised as the ‘well-formed outcome’ questions (available in most ‘Welcome to NLP’-type books), and can be extremely useful *when doing therapeutic work*. Now, it so happens that the questions can be useful for more generalised goal-setting as well, but in that context, a whole new set of issues are opened up. To understand what these issues are (and to find their solution), we must look to presuppositions.

### **Presuppositions in Language**

A presupposition in language can be described as ‘what must be assumed to be true for the sentence to make sense’. For instance, in the sentence “I like bees”, it is presupposed that:

*I exist. Bees exist. Liking is possible.*

So far so good. Now for the question “What do you want?” This presupposes the following:

*You exist. Wanting is possible. There exists some ‘thing’ (the ‘what’) that you desire, but that you lack or otherwise do not have.*

As a tool for helping to focus a person’s mind, this question is excellent, BUT...as soon as a person sets out to answer it, they accept the presupposition that there is something missing. “All well and good”, I hear you say, “If I want a Ferrari, and I don’t have it, then I am experiencing a lack of Ferraris.” And I would agree; it is important to have an accurate view of the present state (Ferrari-deficiency) if you are to stand a chance of reaching the desired state (Ferrari-abundance). The problem is that any goal a person hold’s over a period of time is subject to two of the cardinal laws of consciousness:

- The law of belief
- The law of pattern

*(The Laws of Consciousness aren’t actually real, by the way; I just made them up. If you don’t like them, you can make up your own laws of consciousness.)*

## The Law of Belief

People's beliefs shape their experience of reality. Human beings sort and filter data arriving via their senses from 'reality' to match their expectations about 'the way things are'. This is a real-time process (i.e. It happens *fast*, in milliseconds) that creates our moment-to-moment perceptions of the world. What a person believes to be true is an accurate predictor of what they will perceive (see "If NLP's So Great, Where's My Ferrari" – Rapport 61, September 2004).

## The Law of Pattern

The human brain is designed for pattern recognition, & people learn through pattern. In fact, our ability to detect & recognise patterns can be considered to be the essence of our ability to learn.

Patterns of behaviour & experience are often outside of conscious awareness, but they are powerful indicators of future behaviour (especially if they remain unconscious). The more a pattern is experienced, the more familiar it becomes. The more familiar it becomes (Ibid, p.26), the more likely a person is to repeat it. And the more a person repeats it, the more they experience it. This is a self-reinforcing loop. To put it more simply, whatever state of consciousness you are experiencing today is *practice* for what you're going to experience tomorrow.

For patterns which we like, this is great news. For patterns we don't like, this is great news too, because awareness is the key! Once you bring a pattern into awareness, you can accept it & all it has done for you (every pattern has a positive intention, etc). Then, if you wish, you can begin to release it. Awareness is the first step, acceptance is the second.

## How Language Programs Perception

So why aren't all those well-formed outcomes resulting in avalanches of bliss? Because when a person repeats a statement they believe to be true, *over a period of time*, it programs their perception (which, in turn influences what they experience). This is the basis of the new-age idea of 'affirmations'. If a person repeatedly affirms "I want to be happy", they reinforce the experience of *wanting*. The person whose mantra is "I need a Ferrari" gets to experience *needing*. If you've been trying to lose weight, you may have inadvertently developed a taste for *trying*. So how can we get off this neuro-linguistic treadmill?

Well, fortunately, the laws of consciousness, being laws, work just as effectively to help you get what you desire. You just need to know how to use them:

- 1) Identify what you desire (Eg. Ferrari, wealth, bliss etc).
- 2) Determine what your attitude towards it will be once you have got it.
- 3) Create a *statement of intent* based on that attitude.
- 4) Detach from result and act on your intuitive impulses.

Let's work through an example using the elusive Ferrari:

- 1) Identify what you desire: *A Ferrari*. You can use the well-formed outcome questions to get clear about what it is that you desire. This is a totally appropriate use of the WFO.
- 2) Determine what your attitude towards it will be once you have got it: *Eternal gratitude for my beautiful car*.
- 3) Create a *statement of intent* based on that attitude: *I am grateful for my beautiful car (or I am grateful for the beautiful car that is coming to me)*.
- 4) Detach from result and act on your intuitive impulses: If a person worries about not getting what they want, that worry will program their perception, and

then we're back where we started. The alternative is to 'detach from result'. This means getting into a state of either a) not caring whether you get the Ferrari or not, or b) trusting absolutely that you will get it. Either way, there's nothing to worry about. This allows you to *relax*. And when you relax, you can trust your intuition (aka *your unconscious*) to help you bring your desires into being.

I had a beat-up Vauxhall Cavalier for five years. I wanted a new car, and the more I wanted it, the more I didn't have it. Then I decided to find out what would happen if I was grateful for what I had instead. Every day I said "I'm grateful for my lovely car" (I was faking it). Two weeks later, the car broke down beyond all hope of repair, and I had to get a new one. I love my new car – I truly am grateful for it! Nature abhors a vacuum. Of course, people do have the experience of really, really, really wanting something, and then getting it. But all too often, when it arrives, they are unsatisfied. They still have the experience of wanting, *because that's what they've been practicing*.

Bearing this in mind, you might want to cut to the chase, and focus on the experience you wish to have rather than the things, situations and events that will bring them about.

Statement of Intent	What You Get to Experience
"I want to be happy"	Wanting <input type="checkbox"/>
"I'm trying to lose weight"	Trying <input type="checkbox"/>
"I'm seeking the answer"	Seeking <input type="checkbox"/>

Statement of Intent	What You Get to Experience
"I choose peace"	Choosing <input type="checkbox"/>
"I'm grateful for what I have"	Gratitude <input type="checkbox"/>
"I accept myself as I am"	Acceptance <input type="checkbox"/>

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