

How to speak their language Primary Filters

Have you ever been in a situation where you have been talking to another person and even though you are both speaking English it seems as though you are speaking a different language? You are finding it difficult to understand the other person and also to make them understand you. Often you walk away feeling frustrated, annoyed, confused and you're not too sure why.

In this article we will examine some of the sub-languages that exist beneath English. To illustrate this a little further I'm going to ask you to do something and then we're going to examine what it is that I've asked you to do in the light of some of these sub-languages.

With this in mind, do you remember when you were at school and you'd just come back from holidays and the teacher in primary school asked you to write a story about your holiday. Well, this is what I'm going to ask you to do. In the space provided below, please write two or three paragraphs about your last holiday or about your favourite holiday and we will look at these in a moment.

O.K. Let's put that to one side for a moment. We'll look back at it soon.

What people notice ...

People have different preferences. This means they filter information and notice different things. Have you ever noticed that when you are about to buy a certain type of car, you barely notice the other cars of that type until you have decided on that particular make/model. Once you've made the decision to buy that particular make/model of car, that car seems to be everywhere. Everyone in your city or where you live seems to have traded in their old cars and bought the same car as you. This is no accident. Our brain filters out all of the other types of cars, or many of the other types of cars and notices the type of car that's on your mind. This is a filtering mechanism.

We're going to look at one of the filters. Wyatt Woodsmall has listed over two hundred filters, over two hundred meta programs, ways that we filter things in and out.

We're going to look at one of these called the primary filter.

The primary filter exists around five variables. These five variables are:

- People
- Places
- Things
- Information
- Activities

People

So for example, if a friend of yours had just come back from holidays and you asked them how was the holiday and they had a preference to notice people, you would hear them say something like, "Oh it was fantastic". We met this lovely couple one night for dinner and we actually saw them the next

day on one of the tours. Have you been to Fiji? The people there are just so nice. These people will tell you about the people on their holiday.

Place

Some people have a preference for place. They notice the place. If a friend of yours had just come back from holidays and you asked them, "How was your holiday"? They would say it was fantastic. We climbed to the top of this mountain and when we got to the top the view was just astonishing. And then we went out for dinner one night. At this restaurant when you walked in on the left hand side there's all these hats hanging on the wall and....they're describing the place.

Things

Some people have a preference to notice things. When asked how their holiday was, this person would say, "Oh it was fantastic". Wait here a moment, and they'd run off and they'll find all the stuff that they had bought while away on holidays. They'll tell you about the stuff that they bought duty free, about the stuff that they bought in the village markets. They tell you about their bargains, how much it was. They'll show you the things that they got while they were on holidays.

Information

Some people have a preference for information. When these people come back from holidays and you ask them, "how was their holiday?", they say something like it was so interesting. Did you know that they've been putting people on that island since 1742 and the first boat to go there actually had the same name as the governor who.....they talk about information.

Another example of this is how my parents talk about holidays. If you go to a slide night at my parents' place, you will hear something like this. Dad will show the first slide and he'll say something like, "now this is when we had just arrived in the North Island", and mum will say, "no, no, no, honey, we hadn't left the South Island yet. This is when. This is still the South Island". Dad will say "no we definitely left the South Island in week two", mum will say, "I'll go and get the travel diary, I'll

go and get the travel diary". I'm sitting there thinking, please don't go and get the travel diary. Please can we just watch the next slide. A classic example of people who have a preference for information.

Activity

Some people have a preference for activity. When you ask them how their holiday was, they'll tell you about the activities. They'll say something like, "Oh it was fantastic. We went rock climbing, scuba diving, abseiling, boating", or they will even tell you about the lack of activity. So they might say something like it was fantastic. I lay on a banana lounge. I was served pinna coladas. I read my book. I did nothing. They're still talking about activities, even though it's about inactivity.

What did you notice?

What I'm going to do now is revisit your writing and underline in colour every time you see a preference referred to. For example, if you talk about the people you met, perhaps relatives, underline that in pink.

If you mentioned a place, perhaps you talked about the view or you mentioned a place by name, Sydney, Los Angeles or London, underline that in green.

If you mentioned things, perhaps you talked about what it is that you have bought or what you'd found, underline that in blue.

If you hear yourself talking about information, .dates, times, places, underline that in black.

If you talked about activities, what you did or did not do, underline that in red.

As you do this, see if you can spot a preference. It's important to keep in mind that preferences can be influenced by context. For example, you saw a preference for information in this

particular context, being a holiday context. This does not necessarily mean that that is your preference for ever and ever Amen or in all contexts. It just means for that particular holiday, that's what you noticed.

What do we need to do when trying to find our preferences and the preferences of others? We need to identify patterns rather than one off examples. In order to identify patterns, we could ask ourselves or the other person whose pattern we're trying to identify, a couple of questions. For example, think about the ideal career. The ideal career for someone who has a people preference would probably involve other people. So it may be in a sales or service role.

Career choice

People who have a preference for place would choose a career where the place they work is significant. We did some work once for the Sydney Opera House and there were many people working there who enjoyed the kudos associated with working at the Opera House.

Someone with a preference for things may work where there are lots of gadgets. A mechanic, perhaps an I.T. person where they have access to and can use the latest and greatest in technology.

People with a preference for information might like to work in I.T., but from an information gathering perspective. This may be in a statistical analysis type role, where they gather information and draw conclusions from the information. They enjoy combining information in different ways to draw different conclusions.

Perhaps if the person has a preference for activity, they might like to work in a job with movement, where they get to do lots of things. So for example, builders, landscape gardeners, even jobs in the corporate world where there are lots and lots of

tasks. “Lots of things to do”, is an example of a job that an activity person is attracted to.

Another way to identify preferences is to ask yourself, if you had three free days where everything at work was up to date and you did not have to go to work, “what would you do?” You did not have to do anything, you could do whatever it is you choose to do. What would you choose to do?

A people person might spend a day with their friends. A place person might go to a specific place. A things person might play with gadgets. An information person might read a book. An activity person may do nothing or everything.

Problems at work

Now you can start to see how people with different preferences who are asked to work together or spend time with each other may find it difficult to get things done. Or they might find it difficult to make the relationship work.

For example, as part of a project team, there may be some people who believe the project is about getting the information right before starting. Some people believe the project is about working as a team. Some people might believe the project is about doing certain activities at a certain time and therefore with these competing priorities this is where we start to get confusion.

This is where we start to get conflict. This is where we start to get wastage and error. So if we would like to reduce this conflict and error, reduce wastage and increase the likelihood that things get done right the first time and that the team performs at its best. We need to recognize the language that other people use, recognize our own preferences and to be able to stylise what it is that we’re trying to say in the other person’s language. When we do this, it increases the likelihood that they understand us.

We can also use this knowledge in a number of different ways. We can use this knowledge to:-

- Soar with our strength
- Increase our own versatility
- Speak the other person's language and therefore increase our capacity to persuade and influence
- To coach others

Let's look at each of these in more detail.

Soar with your strengths.

The corporate world goes to great lengths to improve our weaknesses. A lot of energy and time goes into focusing on how we can improve our weaknesses. Sometimes they're referred to as development opportunities. I think this is the politically correct term. While improving weaknesses is good, there are also some drawbacks with this. These drawbacks include having teams of people or individuals focusing on stuff that they don't like, focusing on stuff that they aren't good at and focusing on stuff that they don't have a preference for.

Martin P Seligman wrote a book called "Learned Optimism" and he also wrote a book called "Authentic Happiness". In these books he notes what it is that makes people happy and he documents it to a very detailed level. It's a very scientific approach to happiness. It's certainly not a self-help, airy fairy, touchy feely sort of book. It's a very scientific approach to happiness.

One of the things that he notices is that people are happiest when of course that they're doing what they love, when they're soaring with their strengths. He tells the story about a waitress who was unhappy in her job and she visited his website and she completed an on-line survey that identified her preferences like this one. Her preference was very much around people.

The suggestion was how she could change her job in order to make that preference the focus of the role so that she could soar with her strengths. The suggestion was that she should change her role. She went back to work with the aim of providing the best evening possible for everyone she provided service to. Consequently, she started enjoying her job because the focus of her job had shifted to the people. It had shifted away from taking orders, away from getting the food right, away from the stuff in the kitchen and it had changed to focusing on the clients and customers and making their evening as enjoyable as possible.

One way of using this is to think about your preferences and how you can weave that into your job. How it is that you can make your preference(s) the focus of your role and still get things done. In the space provided below, write down what you think your preference is and a brief description of your role at work. Then try and put the two together and identify how your role would change if you could make your preference, or primary filter, the central component of your role.

Increasing your versatility

We could also use this information to increase your versatility. One of the drawbacks of only soaring with your strengths is that you may be happy but others around you may be miserable because you're not doing what it is you're being employed to do. So what we need to do is to increase your versatility. A good way of doing this is to practise. A way of practising what it is that you noticed is to imagine that each of the primary filters has a hat, and when you put on each of these hats, you notice different things going on around you.

For example, if we put on our people hat, notice what you notice with your people hat on what it is that is going on around you. In the space provided below write down what you notice when you have your people hat on

Now take off your people hat and put on your place hat. In the space provided below write down what you notice when you've got your place hat on.

Now take your place hat off and put on your things hat. In the space provided below, write down what you notice when you have your things hat on.

Now take your things hat off and put on your information hat. In the space provided below, write down what you notice when you have your information hat on.

Now take your information hat off and put on your activity hat. In the space provided below, write down what you notice when you have your activity hat on.

Some of you may know the name Edward de Bono. Edward de Bono is supposedly the Godfather of the term lateral thinking. He has written many books on how to think creatively and how to think laterally. I was in a bookshop a while ago and I came across one of his books, Textbook of Wisdom. I thought, how arrogant, a textbook on how to be wise. That's something you become or something you are, that's not something you practise. So I started flicking through it and it seemed quite interesting. I bought it, it is a phenomenal book. de Bono documents what it is that wise people think and say and do as opposed to what it is the average person thinks, says and does.

One of the things he noticed is that when something happens, the average person will react. They'll react based on how they've reacted to a similar situation in the past or how they've seen someone else react to a similar situation in the past. Therefore, they suffer the consequences.

Whereas, when something happens, in that same split second that it takes the average person to react, wise people are able to respond. They respond by considering all of the things that may have caused the situation to get to this point. They then

generate a list of different ways of being able to respond. They could respond in this way, they could respond in that way, they could respond in the other way. For each of these options they're able to understand the consequences of each of those actions. Based on that analysis they select based on the response and therefore they enjoy the results.

Now, you may be thinking, how can you possibly do all that in a split second when something happens? Well, it's a skill like any other skill. When you first learn to play a sport or when you first learn to drive a car or when you first learn to do something at work, chances are it seemed complex. You have to think about it every step of the way. Now you do it without even thinking because you have practised it so much. You don't need to consciously think about how to hold the golf club. You don't need to consciously think about changing gears so that you don't kangaroo hop in your car. You don't need to consciously think about some of the tasks at work, they just happen on auto pilot.

The same is true for this skill - being able to respond rather than react. If you practise it often enough, understanding what caused this situation to get to this particular point, practise the skills of generating different ways of behaving and practise the skill of understanding the consequences, or imagining the consequences of each of those behaviours and then responding based on that analysis. If you practice often enough you will increase the likelihood that other people will see you as being wise.

We've looked at five possible different ways to react. We could react in terms of thinking about the people, we could react by talking about the implications to people of what is said, we could respond by thinking in terms of the place and by considering the place in our response. We could respond by including things in what we say. We can respond by thinking about the information required. We can respond by talking in terms of activities. We can think about the consequences of each of these responses and then choose based on the result that we would like.

For example, if you were about to go to a BBQ or a family get together, it may be wisest to put your people hat on and approach that party noticing the people at the party.

If perhaps, you are attending a training course or reading a book, perhaps your information hat might be best to put on and you approach that activity with the filter of trying to get as much information as you possibly can.

Perhaps if you're planning a project to be completed by a certain deadline, perhaps it is best to put your activity hat on. What activities we're going to do and how long each will take in order to meet that deadline.

If the aim of the project is to do something accurately or to do it right the first time perhaps it would be best again to wear our information hat. Here we need to think about all of the information that we're going to need in order to get things done right the first time.

In the space provided below, identify yourself in the contexts that you most often find yourself in. If it's a work context, you might consider being more specific. Perhaps you might say I find myself in meetings at work or I find myself talking to team members at work, or I find myself being at home with my family or being with my children. Identify all the contexts that you most often find yourself and then identify next to that which hat it would be wisest to wear in that context.

To persuade and Influence

We build rapport with others when we like each other. Have you noticed how people in deep rapport seem to have the same posture - to stand and/or sit in a similar fashion? Sometimes they even dress the same, speak similarly - or even have the same type of laugh. This is not an accident! People achieve rapport when the differences between them are minimised. This means understanding each others' values, matching physiology / posture / voice tone.....and language style - for example: Do they prefer to talk about people, places, things, information or activities

Why "build" rapport?

From the science of modelling human behaviour, it is suggested that when strong influence and liking patterns are at work, rapport is being built at a deep unconscious level. Therefore, to access states of "being liked", or to effect useful outcomes in business, we can employ the skills of building unconscious rapport, with conscious intent.

The other person or persons will not notice - they will simply feel more at ease with you, more quickly, especially if you are very "unlike" them in the first place. It is important to note that the person does not have to like you or be a friend to have rapport - particularly in a professional context.

Rapport: People who are like each other, like each other!

How building rapport works.

The basic principle of rapport is to *pace* the other person by meeting them where they are.

At an unconscious level, when there is deep rapport, there is a *minimisation of differences* and a *move towards sameness*.

To turn rapport building into a *skill*, learn to create as much sameness as possible and minimise differences by:

Matching And Mirroring

Matching and mirroring involves noticing some part of another person's ongoing experience and doing something the same (mirroring) or something similar (matching).

For example, if the person was sitting swinging a leg, you could sit the same way and swing a leg at the same rate to build sameness, and therefore create rapport (mirroring), or you could move your hand or finger at the same pace to build tempo and movement sameness and therefore create rapport (matching).

Some areas to match and mirror:

- Physiology
 - posture
 - gestures
 - overall muscle tension
 - rhythmic movements - limbs, head
 - eye patterns
 - "energy"
- Voice
 - speed
 - volume
 - rhythms
 - pitch
- Language
 - people, place, things, information, activity
 - jargon
 - repetitive phrases or patterns

Remember building rapport is not about copying the other person and involves the subtle use of these influence patterns. Mimicry or copying can break rapport - so practice carefully and notice others around you - when there is natural rapport, you will find matching and mirroring occurring naturally, completely out of their awareness.

Matching Language

One of the areas that we can match and mirror is language. We can listen to the other person's preference. We can listen to the language that they use. This indicates their preference in terms of people, place, activity, information. We can then structure our message based around that preference.

Assume we want to persuade someone to support a disaster recovery project and that person's preference was people. What we could say is how the disaster recovery project will reduce people's stress, will make people's jobs easier, will reduce the frustration when their system has gone down. If we can catch what it is that we want people to do in their preference, they are more likely to support our cause.

If the person's preference was information, we could talk about the disaster recovery in terms of the information that could be lost if we do not consider this disaster recovery project and the implications of losing that information.

If the person's preference is about activity we could talk about all of the activities that we'll have to do if we don't submit a disaster recovery plan. It would describe all of the activities required if a disaster happened and we weren't prepared.

In the space below do the following four things. Firstly, identify someone you struggle to communicate with. Secondly, identify their preference. Thirdly, identify the issue you'd like to raise, you'd like to persuade or influence them on. Fourthly, identify how you could word your message, using their language.

Coaching Others

Have you ever been on auto pilot? Perhaps it was when you were driving home from work the same way you always drive home. All of a sudden you arrive home and you think to yourself, how did I get here? I can't remember anyone honking their horn at me so I must have done alright. This

often happens because our conscious mind is elsewhere and our sub-conscious mind is able to drive without us having to think about it. So we don't have to consciously think about changing gears or stopping at lights. Our conscious mind can be singing to the radio, talking to the person next to us, thinking about what it is that we're going to do tomorrow.

Sometimes, people approach other tasks or other people on auto pilot. An example of this is when we start taking our partner for granted. We start doing the task the same way and expecting different results. Or when we start responding to team members and managers based on something that has happened between us in the past.

Sometimes, auto pilot is useful. It means that we're able to do things quickly and cleanly without having to consciously think about it. Sometimes, it's wise to examine what we do when on auto pilot to make sure it is as effective as possible.

If you're in a position where you need to provide someone feedback to help them to do something better. Is an opportunity to coach someone to see what it is that they do or say when on auto pilot that perhaps is useful or not useful.

Perhaps then the primary filter tool is a tool that we can use to draw people's attention to their preference. To what they notice, to the language that they use and therefore the benefits and the drawbacks of using that language and noticing those things in different contexts.

For example, perhaps a team member has a preference for people and is easily distracted, is chatty and as a result is missing deadlines because they are talking to other team members. We could coach this person by helping them notice that the trigger revolves around other people. That the trigger revolves around a person walking towards them, a person walking past them, a person phoning them, a person sending them an email, going and getting a coffee and talking to other people. Ask them how they would behave if they noticed different things. So instead of noticing people, if they noticed things. What is the person carrying. Perhaps if they noticed

activities, what is it that I'm meant to be doing? They would respond differently. If they thought in terms of place. I'm at work not in a café so therefore, I should get back to work. If they notice in terms of information, what information do I need from them in terms of finishing my task.

If we can help people notice their own preference(s) and whether it is helping or hindering them and then help them notice different preferences we'll get a better performance.

More tools in your toolbox ...

In conclusion, understanding preferences reduces the stress and frustration associated with not understanding other people or finding it difficult to have them understand us. Understanding preferences increases the likelihood of being able to persuade or influence others. If we would like to improve our ability to coach others, reduce the amount of time spent doing stuff we don't like doing, increase the amount of time doing stuff we do like doing, we can use the skill of primary filters. We can notice our own preference, our own primary filter and we can change that primary filter depending on the context. We can also help other people notice their preference, their primary filter and we can help them to change their primary filter to get better results.

Remember, if the only tool you have in your toolbox is a hammer, everything is going to look like a nail and of course it isn't. Sometimes, we need different tools to do different jobs. Primary filters provide us with five very broad different tools.



Some things to reflect on...

What do you prefer to notice: people, places, things, information or activities?

How could you apply that preference to your current role to maximise your enjoyment in that role?

What preferences do you need to practice to increase your versatility?

Who would you like to be able to communicate better with?

What are the similarities and differences between you in physiology, voice and language?

How could you minimise the differences and maximise the similarities?

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