Anchors and Chains

If only we could bottle up success.....

Following our recent course "An Introduction to NLP for ADIs" I have been asked a lot about 'anchoring'. So I thought I would deliver a breakdown of the process and some examples.

The following is a small ripple in an ocean of information, facts and beliefs surrounding the subject. I hope it begins to explain some of the uses and approaches you could introduce to your clients.

Emotions are at the centre of driving. Road rage, anger, aggression, adrenaline buzz, fear are just a few of the commonly recognised human related 'crash factors' which make up over 90% of collisions. Some of these are primal - revenge was recently accepted to be a primal instinct rather than the pre-meditated response it was previously believed to be - others are more controllable, and we have a habit of focussing and holding onto the negative ones. However, there are positive 'counter balances' which can be beneficial forces for good - success, achievement, praise, confidence, to name a few.

Anchoring is a way of storing these states and triggering them when desired. Understanding the process of anchoring can also prevent us from inadvertently doing same to negative emotions from experiences such a test failures, which we often do without meaning to.

The process is a perfectly natural one that you and I have used regularly since birth. We attach emotional states to certain triggers. A baby with a favourite toy or blanket, the song on the radio that takes you back 20 years, the dread I feel when hearing the name "Christopher". The triggers can be physical, audible, in fact any of the senses can elicit a response. What anchoring does is to take the emotional state and deliberately connect it to something which you or the individual can use or trigger later.

Interestingly, the DVSA identified that all ADIs had been doing this for years, which is why they changed the test. Can you think how?

Well, candidates were being programmed to respond to a trigger being given at regular intervals by the Examiner during the driving test. It was a simple and regular verbal trigger

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which enabled the candidate to pass their test, while not necessarily being competent enough for 'real life'. This was because once the trigger was removed drivers were failing to continue the actions! Any ideas?

The anchored action being triggered? - Mirror checks!
The trigger itself? The directional command. E.g. "At the end of the road...."
The solution brought in by the DVSA? The independent drive

A number of examiners have commented to me that the biggest change they have seen from the independent drive is that while searching for the route, mirror and signal 'habits' get forgotten. I have also seen this in both my own drivers and those with other ADIs.

During the 'traditional' instruction-led test, candidates were given verbal commands which actually structured the candidates driving. Once they passed their test, this trigger was no longer present leaving their situational awareness in their own control. What the 'Independent Drive' has done is allow some freedom of expression requiring a more candidate-led approach to junctions and driving. That is not to say there are no triggers, but that they are self-imposed. Spotting the junctions, pedestrians, pinch points. All of these become triggers which will stay with them through their future on the road.

Anchoring - A simple explanation

By applying a sound, action or feeling (specific pressure point) at the moment of heightened emotional state this sensory input gets connected to the feeling. The state can then be brought back by using this sound/action/pressure.

I use the anchoring technique in two different ways, covertly and overtly. These vary dramatically between drivers, with differing success. But an open-minded trial and error approach has allowed me the highest levels of success across the board.

What do I mean by covert and overt anchoring? Simply, sometimes I explain to the pupil about the anchoring process (really simply). "I have a great technique that will help you take the confidence you have in your driving, bottle it, and use it at will! All you have to do is <trigger>". Alternatively I take moments of positivity and success, grab them with both

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hands and steal them away with a clap of the hands or a tap on the dash board. I can then invoke them later when the negative forces kick in.

Example 1 - Covert anchoring: The car stalls, the drivers confidence sinks. I wait for the peak of emotion to pass (I don't want to anchor this negative emotion then, once the cause is established (if necessary) - "Right <claps hands>, let's get that engine started." picking them up and forward focussing the solution rather than the error. After a good build up of positivity in the anchor (grabbing every opportunity to 'layer' new successes on the initial ones), all you need to do is give a little clap and you see them lifted, and forward focussed.

Example 2 - Overt anchoring: Get the pupil to focus on a time/times that they felt positive, confident and in control. Get the to picture the moment, magnifying it and making the image or feelings as strong and intense as they can. While focussing on the peak of this feeling tap their hand lightly on the wheel. The spot is not important, but it needs to be practical and easy to repeat. (You could use the gear lever so every change makes them relaxed and focussed)

Once you have used anchoring techniques, you start to notice that some respond more than others. Those which respond best (especially those that crave the feeling of praise) can also benefit from timing of praise. For example - When encouraging blind-spot checks, do not praise them after the check. Instead do it AS they check, making the 'chin to shoulder' action the trigger for the 'praise feeling'. After a while they will start wanting to check "because it feels bad not to". Great!

<u>Inadvertent negative anchors</u>

I notice a decent number of ADIs parking at the test centre for their pupils. Often the response is "It takes the pressure off!" Is this really helping them, or are there hidden forces at work? (Not to mention the subconscious message of "There's some bits of driving that you are not ready for yet.")

Let's consider the scenario:

A pupil fails their test and, for the first time in a long while, sits in the passenger seat while you drive them home and empathise, trying to positively debrief them. Picture that negativity dripping from them and seeping into the passenger seat.

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They go away and work REALLY hard to improve and correct any faults. As we know, if we have done our job properly the fail issues are normally a small part of a largely decent drive. They rebook their test and drive brilliantly pre-test. The ADI swaps seats and, while they position the car, the pupil sucks up all those feeling they have anchored to sitting in the passenger seat.

Is this the frame of mind that you want them starting their test in?

Similar negative triggers can be placed using your own habits, so be aware of any anchoring you may be doing already. Good and bad.

If this has triggered your interest in anchoring, NLP or driver psychology then get in touch for further details. Courses will be run regularly across the country and there are some great new products, ideas and opportunities also being launched throughout the year. Check out our website at www.badis.co.uk for more details.

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