

Free Ebook: Virginia Satir's 10 magical patterns



Virginia Satir was well known as an excellent and powerful communicator. To many whom have known her personally she really was a woman overflowing with heart and skill. All her patterns desire the premise of an appreciative attitude. This is the secret how these patterns will unfold their magical impact. Here is an excerpt for you:

- 1) Focus on the present and the future (solution-oriented)**
- 2) Find the Positive Intentions**
- 3) Do not blame anyone else or yourself**
- 4) Facilitate equality**
- 5) Provide positive alternative choices**
- 6) Reframe behaviours and perceptions**
- 7) Don't only reflect - Get into action**
- 8) Use the power of association and dissociation**
- 9) Get in touch - physically**
- 10) Use your humour**

1) Focus on the present and the future (solution-oriented)

Virginia Satir would always listen to people's complaints and blaming about the past in order to maintain rapport. She then would directly turn their attention to solutions and wanted outcomes for the present and future. This really is one of our basic NLP patterns. If someone tells us about something he/she doesn't like we would immediately ask what he/she wants to have instead. I have seen a lot of NLP coaches who do this way a little too early for my taste. Often people desperately need to be heard first. They want to be taken seriously in the way they feel, with the problems they bring into the coaching session.

There is a pattern to how Virginia got people to leave the past behind and to focus on the present. She would have said something like *„I want you to look at me now, and I want you to listen really carefully. There's a lot of history and I don't know what it is, and I have a hunch that often-times you don't see what's right in front of your nose, because it is all covered up with what you expect, because you almost did it right now. Are you with*

me? (...) OK, now I'd like you to look at Casey and feel his skin through your hands at this moment and tell me what you feel.“ (Satir Step by Step, Satir and Baldwin, 1983, pp. 112-114)

So what did she do? She made the person focus on the here and now. She directed the persons attention to her face (... look at me now...) and to her voice (...listen really carefully). She agreed to the heard and also the unheard past (There's a lot of history and I don't know what it is...). She also told them what she observed and presumed AND she asked if the person shares this impression. A very important factor. If you share a picture from your map you'd better ask the client if he can see himself in it.

After having found a solution-oriented outcome for the present or the future Virginia stuck with it. She went after it tenaciously and helped the person to make it acceptable and even better: desirable.

2) Find the positive intention

„There is a yearning behind every defensive stance.“

Virginia Satir always presupposed positive intentions and distinguished between behaviour and intention. One of her main beliefs was that people mean well, even when they do mean things.

She used the positive intention as a basis in order to search for more positive feelings, behaviour and communication. Taking on the belief that everybody has good intentions changes our responses to people when they show inappropriate behaviour. It facilitates connecting to them and - if we are the person who „did wrong or bad“ - to ourselves.

3) Do not blame anyone or yourself

„Destructive behaviour is simply a result of limited opportunities to learn how to respond more positively.“

Virginia Satir never blamed anyone. She sometimes quoted the comic strip character Mammy Yokum „*Good is better than evil because it is nicer.*“ This is what she taught.

If you blame someone you will only produce more bad feelings which lead to more destructive behaviour. In her experience people's behaviour simply followed what they learned in the past.

How can you blame someone for he is doing the best he can? Instead of blaming, you can be helpful by becoming aware of the patterns and teach them new, more useful ones.

4) Create equality

Flexibility with roles:
„Any of us can be a teacher or a student to the other.“

Maybe you have already heard about how Virginia Satir used to put children on footstools and chairs so they could be on eye level with their parents. She herself often bent over to children in order to communicate on their body height. There is the obvious part that this creates equality in size for a moment.

At the same time Virginia demonstrated a visual expression of her „Growth Model“ (cf. The Satir Model, Satir et al. 1991, pp.32-33). She believed that all people are equal both in personal relationships and in the field of therapy. She distinguished roles from identity. „Any of us can be a teacher or a student to the other.“ Virginia carried this belief through all of her work by being a role model to people. Although she restated very directly, yet carefully, what she had heard, or she painted a picture how a situation occurred to her, she then asked the people to correct her if she was wrong. She showed respect to people's maps - as we would say in NLP - and did not believe that she was any better because of her role as a therapist.

„Everybody's got their own picture.“

„People tend to respond to others as they think of themselves.“

There is a third aspect to it. Virginia believed that most fights are based on a lack of information and on noticing differences. So if someone complained about a person's behaviour she used to ask: *Have **you** ever done such a thing yourself? Have **you** ever felt e.g. angry yourself? So then you know that sometimes people are this way; these are human problems.* (freely quoted) Seeing the similarities between people is the basis for understanding and compassion.

5) Provide positive alternative choices

„When we get new information, we have new possibilities.“

Instead of getting rid of problem behaviours Virginia Satir used to ask herself what she could add to a person's model of the world so he would be able to make better choices. When there are better choices there is no need for showing the problem behaviour anymore.

„I spend no time stopping behaviour. I say, ‘That's a skill you've got. Now let's see if we can have some other ones.’“

6) Reframe behaviours and perceptions

„When you say ,This is strange.' Do you mean ,This is a new thing.'?“

The concept of reframing is so popular in NLP that there is no need to explain it in detail. With reframing you change the meaning of perceptions and behaviour and so facilitate more positive feelings and constructive behaviour. If you change the meaning of a behaviour or perception, you change people's responses to it. The important factor is to find a more positive connotation in your reframing. For example you could turn „criticism“ into an „opportunity for learning“.

I once had a friend who was in a long-distance relationship. His girlfriend said that whenever she left his apartment she turned her feelings off and that is how she won't miss him. He was so upset and complained she did not love him enough because if she truly did she could not turn her feelings off. I asked him if I could share my view on this. He agreed and I told him:

I believe, because she loves you so much she has to turn her feelings off, otherwise she would not survive being without you for the next week.

7) Don't only reflect - Get into action

Tribal Teaching
„Knowledge is only a
rumour until it is in
the muscle.“

Virginia frequently pointed out that people change only if they get into action. They have to fully experience the new perceptions, events and results of words. As NLP skilled people we use the „as if“-frame in order to create reference experiences in our mind. Combined with perceptual positions, association and the tools of submodalities we can create an intense body experience.

One wonderful addition Virginia used to do is to let people really practice new words, phrases, reactions. In a coaching session she would direct people to speak new phrases out loud and then focus their attention to their body sensations.

It is a huge difference in the way your system responds whether you say: „This is would make everybody feel sad. Everybody wants to be loved.“ or „I feel very sad at this moment. I want to feel that she loves me.“

Another powerful element of Virginia's effectiveness was her Family Sculpture. She often positioned family members in a still sculpture that displayed their typical ways of interacting with each other. Sometimes she extended this to kind of a Stress Ballet that demonstrated a certain sequence of interactions between family members. These sculptures facilitate insights into repetitive processes. Virginia then developed new ways to interact and let people get into the new sculpture or ballet to make them feel what positive alternative choices are available. This is an effective way to create physical experiences.

8) Use the power of association and dissociation

„For every feeling we have, we will have a body response.“

Switching between associated and dissociated perceptual positions is a very powerful tool. When inviting people to Sculptures or Stress Ballets Virginia provided a full associated experience to everybody.

„Anger is often a defensive feeling. There are softer feelings underneath which need to be dealt with.“ Very often it is necessary to help people to get in touch with their feelings first if you want to enhance deep change.

The basic principle of forcing association and dissociation would be: If someone says anything positive, insist that he says it in a way that connects him directly with someone else on the basis of this positive feeling. By doing so you will make people associate into this positive experience. „You said you appreciated that she'd helped you. Take a moment and feel your appreciation.“

If someone says anything destructive advice him to tell you more about „the picture“. You can wonderfully use this in a sculpture or stress dance as this already is an externalized picture of a certain situation. This will help people to see from a dissociated viewpoint and finally new possible solutions because they are not stuck in the negative, resourceless feeling anymore.

You can also pay attention to people speaking from their „I“-perspective. People often use to dissociate themselves by talking about people in general instead of their own feelings. You may want to correct them like Virginia often did by saying e.g.: „Tell him, that you care for him. Simply say: I care for you.“

9) Get in touch - physically

„We need 4 hugs a day for survival. We need 8 hugs a day for maintenance. We need 12 hugs a day for growth.“

„Touching is a universal language.“

Virginias Growth Model follows the principles of love, discovering your personal feelings and your individuality, and the freedom to express these. She was convinced that connecting in a physical way is one of the common human desires and deepest yearnings. Our society often denies this fact. We become socialized in a way that makes touching each other an unusual behaviour. Virginia emphasized that there is a non-sexual way of connecting and touching that satisfies our essential desire. An interesting observation is that people often feel it is easier to speak congruently when they are in touch with the other person e.g. by holding their hands and looking into the eyes.

In her work as a therapist, coach and a trainer Virginia Satir always kept in touch physically with all of the people involved. When she worked with people it was important to her to connect with everybody by shaking or holding hands, standing close to them, touching shoulders... She saw herself as a role model. If she wanted people to get closer she would have to show them how easy this can be and how good it feels.

Being so close to the person has another advantage: You can see more and feel more of what is going on inside the person. You receive more valuable information about the skin colour changing, the moisture of the hands, the breath rythm and whether it is deep or shallow et cetera. You also provide a safe and caring atmosphere. Two helpful aspects if you want to facilitate change and personal developement.

10) Use your humour

„I find that the things that have the most fun are the most profound.“

Humour and Laughter are such important resources: They are enjoyable and lighten your emotional state. If you are able to make fun even of a serious problem it will help you not to take it too seriously. It also disassociates you from the negative feelings and thus gives you a new helpful viewpoint. Do not confuse this with defensive humour that tends to dismiss and ignore problems.

One example is a reframe Virginia used when she worked with a teenager boy of the age of 17 who had gotten two of his classmates pregnant. She said. „Well, at least we know you've got good seed.“ This way of seeing the issue with a bit of humour made it easier to bypass blame and attacks. After having said so Virginia could begin to ally herself with the boy and he was open to work together with her towards solutions.

Contact

For more information about the work of Virginia Satir click on www.nlp-ways.com

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