

Five Tools To Craft a Better You

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What is a tool?

A tool is something you can manipulate directly to make a change in a system.

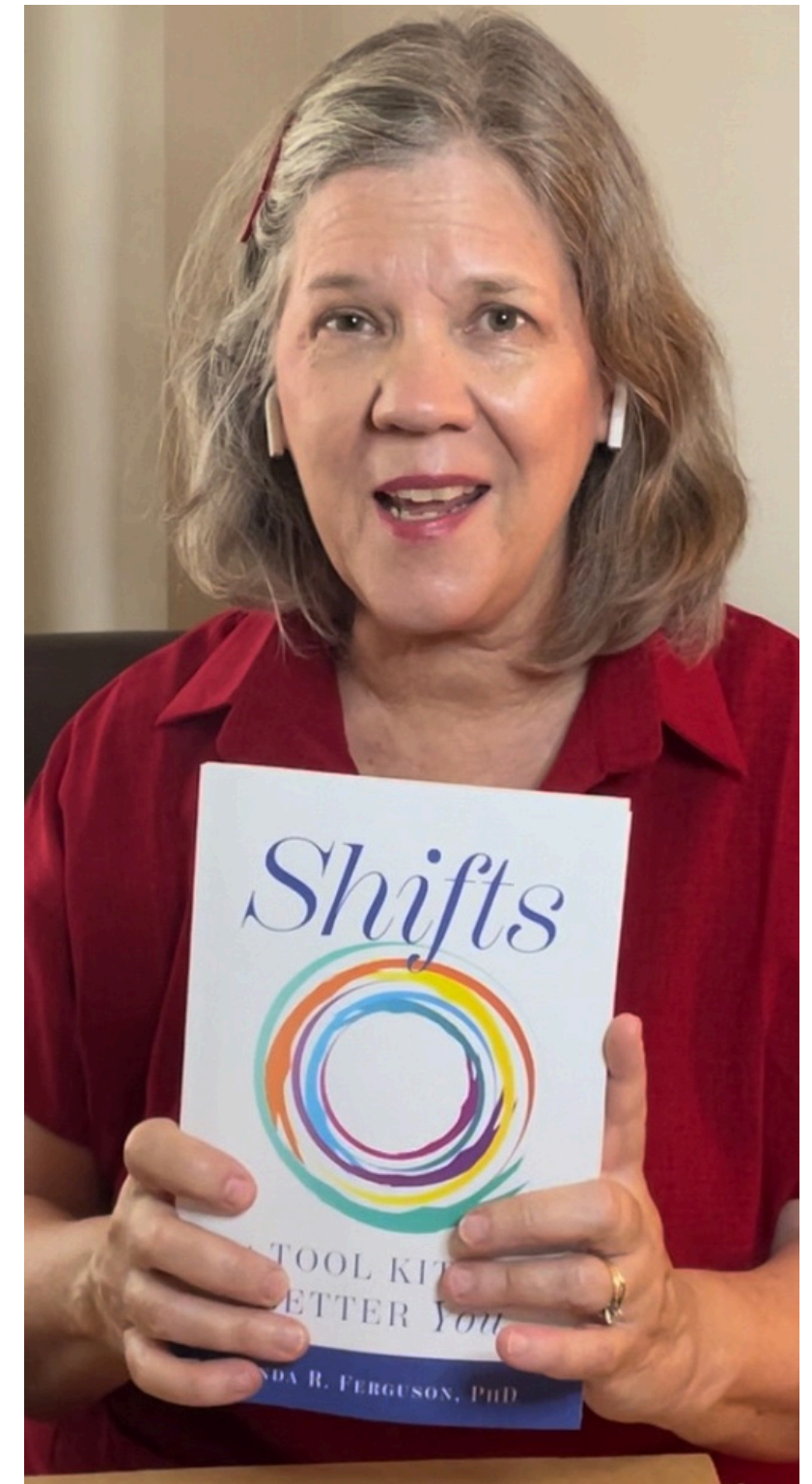
You don't use a screwdriver just to work with screws. Screws matter because they hold things together. Screws create a new whole, a connection of two things into a system. Screwdrivers move the screw so something else changes.

When I wrote Shifts, I called it a toolkit. What it describes are five tools that are available to anyone who wants to make meaningful change.

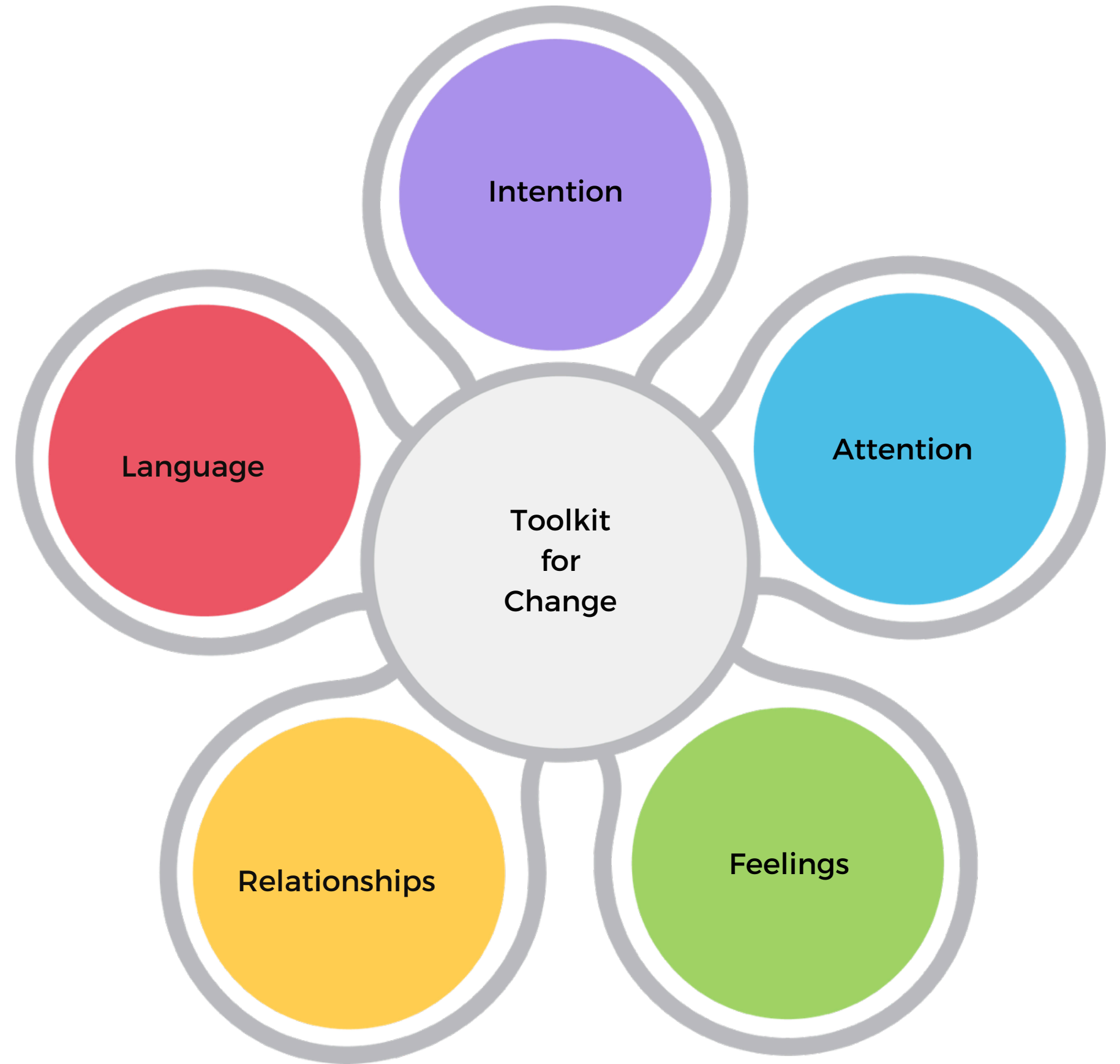
These tools are the parts of your mind, body, and relationships that you can change so that the whole of you becomes different, with different strengths and capabilities.

It's easy to know when you have changed your posture. It's much harder to know when you have changed your mind in a way that is meaningful.

Intention, attention, feelings, relationships, and language are tools you can use deliberately to change who you are.



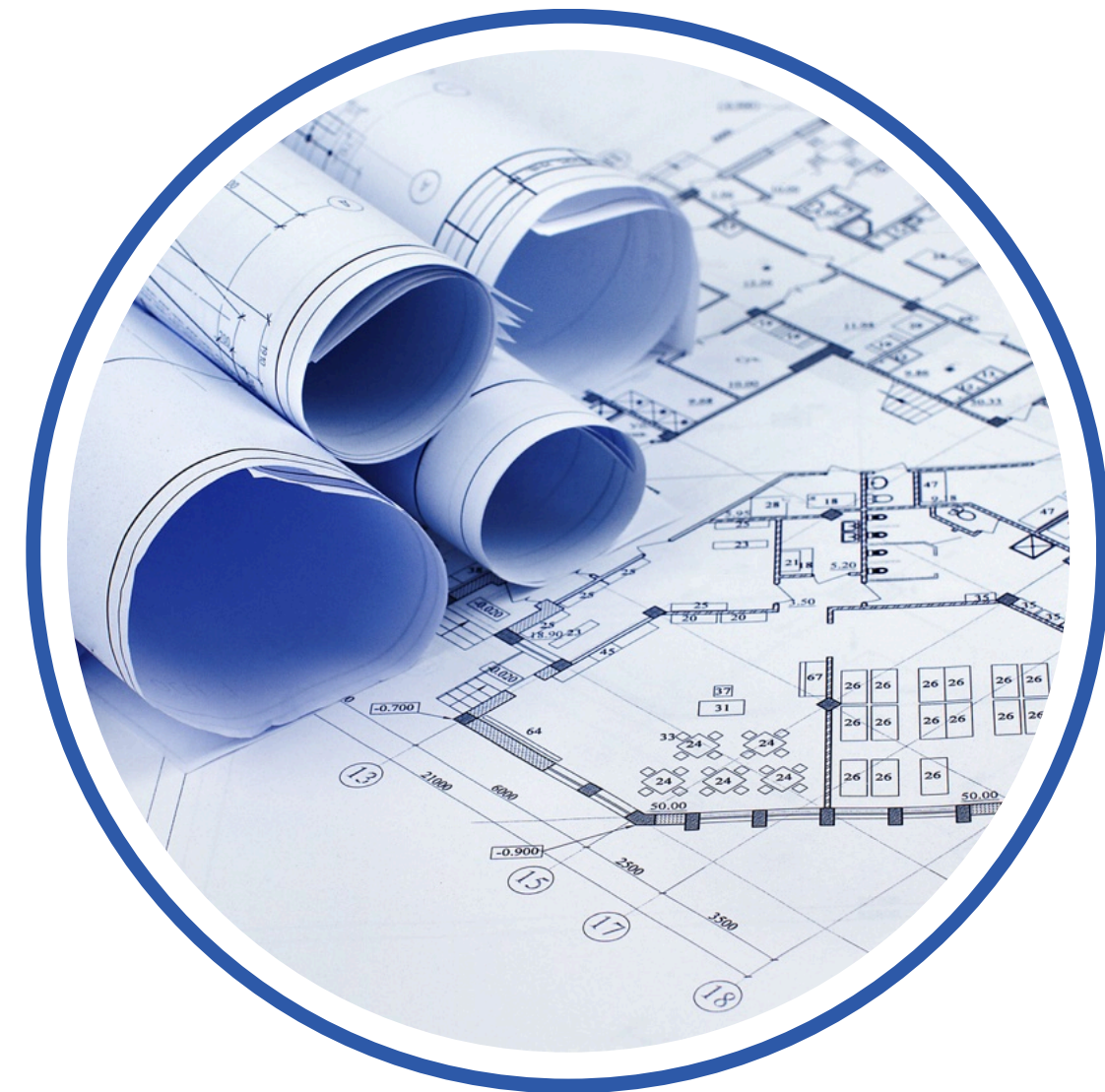
The five tools



Intention is a blueprint

Your short term goals and your purpose combine to define what you want to create in your future. Together, we call them your intention.

Your intention is something you can change directly. You can make a different choice in your blueprint for the future.



Decide what you want

We often talk about knowing what you want. Sometimes you know and sometimes you must make a decision. That decision will ripple out to change what you notice, how you feel, and how you form relationships.

In every epic adventure, the hero has to decide whether to accept the challenge at the heart of the story. In your own life, you have to decide what values and beliefs will guide your choices.

You can start by deciding whether you want to grow or to win.

Winning sounds good, but it means you are always at risk of losing. The human brain fears loss more than it values an equal gain. When we want to minimize loss, we aim lower and risk less.

If your goal is growth, then you never lose, but it is harder to know how to measure success. So the intention to grow is usually best when tethered to a tangible commitment to making something happen.

Your intention is a tool for shaping what you do and how you feel about it.

Attention connects us

In any given moment, what you pay attention to determines the way you connect to your circumstances and your relationships.

While some of your attention is determined by biology (you listen to loud; you look at bright; you feel pain or pressure), you can also move your attention deliberately to make new connections.



Attention makes connections

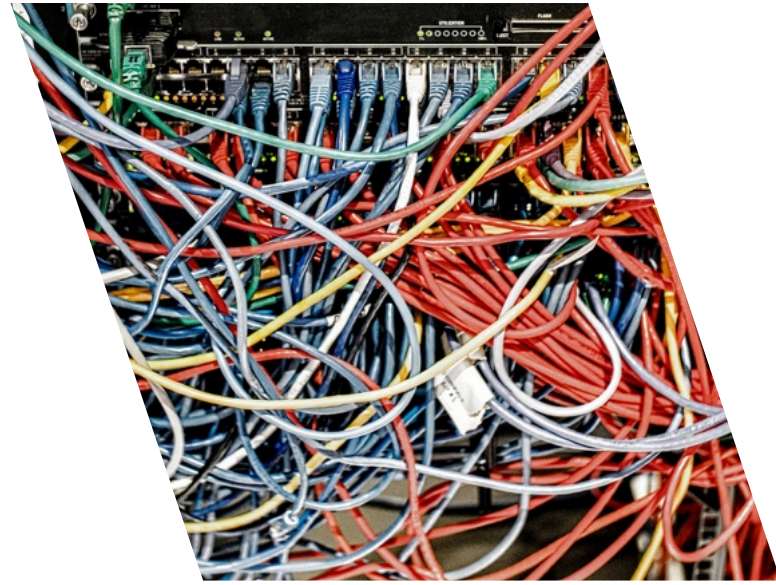
We all know that a screwdriver is a tool we use to connect or disconnect two things.

It's less obvious that our attention is a mental screwdriver. It makes and breaks connections with parts of ourselves, with other people, and with situations.

At any given moment, what we give our attention is more real to us than anything outside our attention. Our attention fastens our feelings, goals, and behaviours to external realities and relationships. It is a tool we use to connect or disconnect.

Can you consciously change your attention? Of course. You can move your attention from the room you're in to the game on the television or from the conversation around you to that thing you forgot to do. Attention wanders, but you can bring it back again.

You can also focus. You can zoom in on the details or zoom out to see the big picture. While these choices might seem to be automatic, you know that you can direct them consciously.



Change your internal connections

You cannot control every thought that comes into your mind or every association you make between something new and something stored in memory. But you can consciously form new associations to add to your automatic responses..

When you notice that your thoughts are not serving you, you pay attention in a different way. Since conscious attention is limited, new thoughts and perceptions will displace thoughts you didn't control and didn't like.

This is not once and done. Your brain is continuously making new connections to reinforce or change the learning it has stored. Every day, you have the power to add new associations to existing memories.

Zoom in and out



You can also change the perspective of your external attention. While some things grab your attention, you can change the way you perceive them so that you feel differently and act differently.

You can use your senses to notice more stimuli in your surroundings or to notice physical sensations within you. You can deliberately look for the information that allows you to shape a path to the future you want.

When you use your attention to zoom in, you focus on connecting what you already have or already know. When you zoom out, you see possibilities around or beyond your current situation.

Attention does not create possibilities. It makes a connection to them, just as a screwdriver connects things that were previously not connected.

Feelings move us

Feelings are a hammer that shape your actions and communication.

I know that many people will object that you cannot or should not control your feelings.

But you make choices about what you feel all the time. We choose to make ourselves warm or cold, anxious or excited, stiff or flexible.



Feelings connect with pressure

If attention is a screwdriver, then emotions are a hammer. They exert pressure so that you will react to situations or act to further your goals and values.

When you recognize that emotions are communications from your super-aware brain to your less-aware mind, you begin to see them as tools that are meant to move you, not as states you cannot help experiencing.

In every situation, you are free to choose from a range of possible emotional responses. You can ask: 'what else could I be feeling that would be more useful?'

Feelings are like a hammer because they are noisy and they make an impact. They force you to pay attention, in the way that the hammer drives the nail to make a connection.

If you don't like your feelings, you can think about your goals or purpose and ask "how is this feeling helping me move in the right direction?" When you see the benefit, the feeling won't be a problem. It will be a tool.

And then you can use it to take action.

All feelings are physical



All emotion is experienced physically. You know you are having an emotion when something changes in your body. Although the mechanisms are complicated, the experience is straight forward. Something changes in your muscle tension, heart rate, breathing, temperature, visual focus, or response to sound. When it does, you connect these changes to your situation and decide what label to give the feeling.

It's not true that no one else can make you feel something (that's semantics; other people's communication and behaviour often have the express purpose of making you feel something). It is true that you can change what they make you feel. You don't have to hold on to every feeling you experience.

When you change your physiology (your body and senses), you also change your emotions. And the new emotions prompt you to take action to stay safe or move toward a goal.



Feel the nudge to change

Feelings are tools because they can be used to make change happen. Whether you move toward good feelings or away from bad ones, feelings make ideas like beliefs, values, and goals tangible through your senses.

They are like a hammer because they use force to get you moving. They don't define the connections that will move you forward; they motivate you to move either toward the good or away from the bad.

When you recognize a feeling, you can decide. Should you change the feeling to something more comfortable? Or should you use the feeling to motivate you to action?

Relationships steady us

Relationships are big connections. They are the wrench that tightens or loosens your sense of where you fit and what your life means.

Humans are pack animals, and we are steadied by our pack. Our connections to other people need to be strong enough for safety and collaboration and loose enough for independence and freedom.



Relationships connect

If attention is a screwdriver, then relationships are a wrench. They make bigger, stronger connections not just between us and other people, but between us and the skills and resources to make things happen.

We learn, collaborate, support, inspire and drive ourselves through our connections to other people. Most relationships remind us of the gap between what is real and what we want.

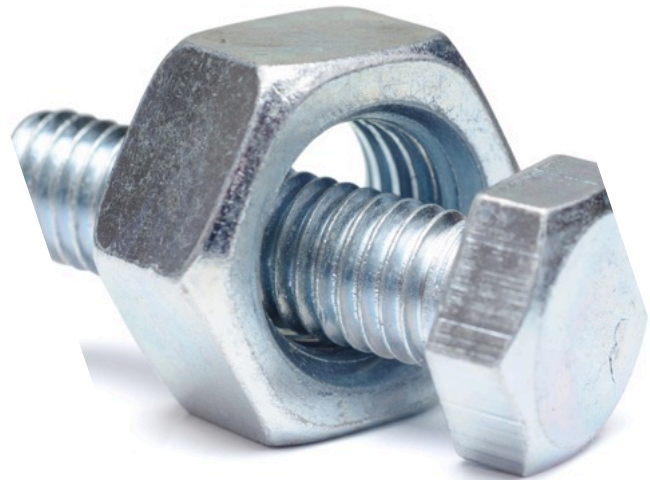
Even people with whom we have no personal connection can connect us to a bigger world.

Anyone we can observe can become a model of possibilities and potential. We learn from what others are able to do.

When we choose to form new relationships or to change the way we connect in relationships, we make new learning, collaboration and motivation possible.

Our webs of social connection don't trap us. They can be both safety nets and climbing ropes, enabling us to see what change is possible and take the risks necessary to make it.

Keep it together



When you want to be stronger, you need something that holds the various parts of you together, something strong enough to withstand the stresses that will pull at you.

Relationships allow you to connect who you are now to the self you have been in your past, and the self you want to become. As you are connected to a variety of different people, you create external connections that hold parts of your identity in place. At the same time, adding new people to your life extends the potential for all of you. The more strong connections you add, the bigger your range of choices and abilities.

While the experience of building and living in relationships can be wrenching (it's hard to lose people and sometimes hard to keep them), the overall effect of our relationships is to create a larger, more stable, and more competent self.





Grow your potential

As you look at what other people have done, you see what you might be able to do. The more connected you feel to these role models and the more access you have to observe them, the more likely you are to grow your own skills and abilities.

You might also want to accomplish things you cannot do on your own. Every business requires the collaboration of people with different backgrounds and skills. Your ability to connect deliberately with people who have the skills, strengths or resources you need will be essential to realizing your goals.

Your relationships connect you to models and resources outside yourself. This is the most reliable way to build the skills and strengths inside yourself.

Language hones us

When we hone something, we gradually make it more perfect by eliminating excess or sharpening its edges.

The words we choose, the stories we tell, and the questions we ask are all tools that hone our ideas and perceptions so that we predict what we need and understand what we have accomplished.



Language shapes you

Language is a chisel you use to take roughly-formed goals, strengths, and skills and refine them so you achieve more with less waste.

You begin by attaching words to thoughts, perceptions, people, and environments. Words make thoughts tangible and transform physical reality into something you can manipulate in your mind.

Words are normally generated by your brain. You think in words without choosing them consciously. But when you become aware of your words, you can ask: “what other words would be useful here?”

Useful words are words that help you to serve your purpose, reach your goals, or feel the way you want to feel. Since words overlap in meaning, there is usually more than one word that would convey the same thought. Different words connect to different things in your memory and experience, and to different responses.

A useful word connects what you are thinking now to something you want in the future. Testing the connections of a word allows you to see not just what it says, but what it creates, reinforces, or shapes in you..

Stories shape predictions



You probably think of a story as a kind of history, a pattern of words that shows how something happened. But the only reason for understanding the past is to predict the future. Stories are accounts of something that did happen or could happen that allow you to think with more precision about what is likely to happen next.

You use stories to understand how choices lead to results, and how unexpected obstacles and opportunities can be managed. Every story, whether it comes from life or art, helps you recognize patterns in your own life, and respond actively in ways that serve you.

Stories have been chiselling away some expectations and refining others throughout your life. When you tell a story, you reveal how you process the world and when you listen to a story, you add to the pathways that will lead you to positive results.



Questions reveal

Michaelangelo is often quoted as saying that he saw the angel in the stone and carved until it was revealed. Although the quote is inaccurate, it is a vivid description of the way that the questions we formulate chip away at the inessential until we see how to achieve a goal or restore something good.

Your brain is likely to make many things feel real because you have thought about them vividly or often or with strong emotion. Questions chip away the connections between the thing under consideration and memories of other times, other meanings, or other things.

We often wish we knew our real selves, the ones we can count on day after day and year after year. The best way to know yourself better is to ask questions that chip away at circumstance and wishful thinking to reveal the what matters.

Your toolkit for change



Tools don't make anything happen. They extend your ability to make things happen.

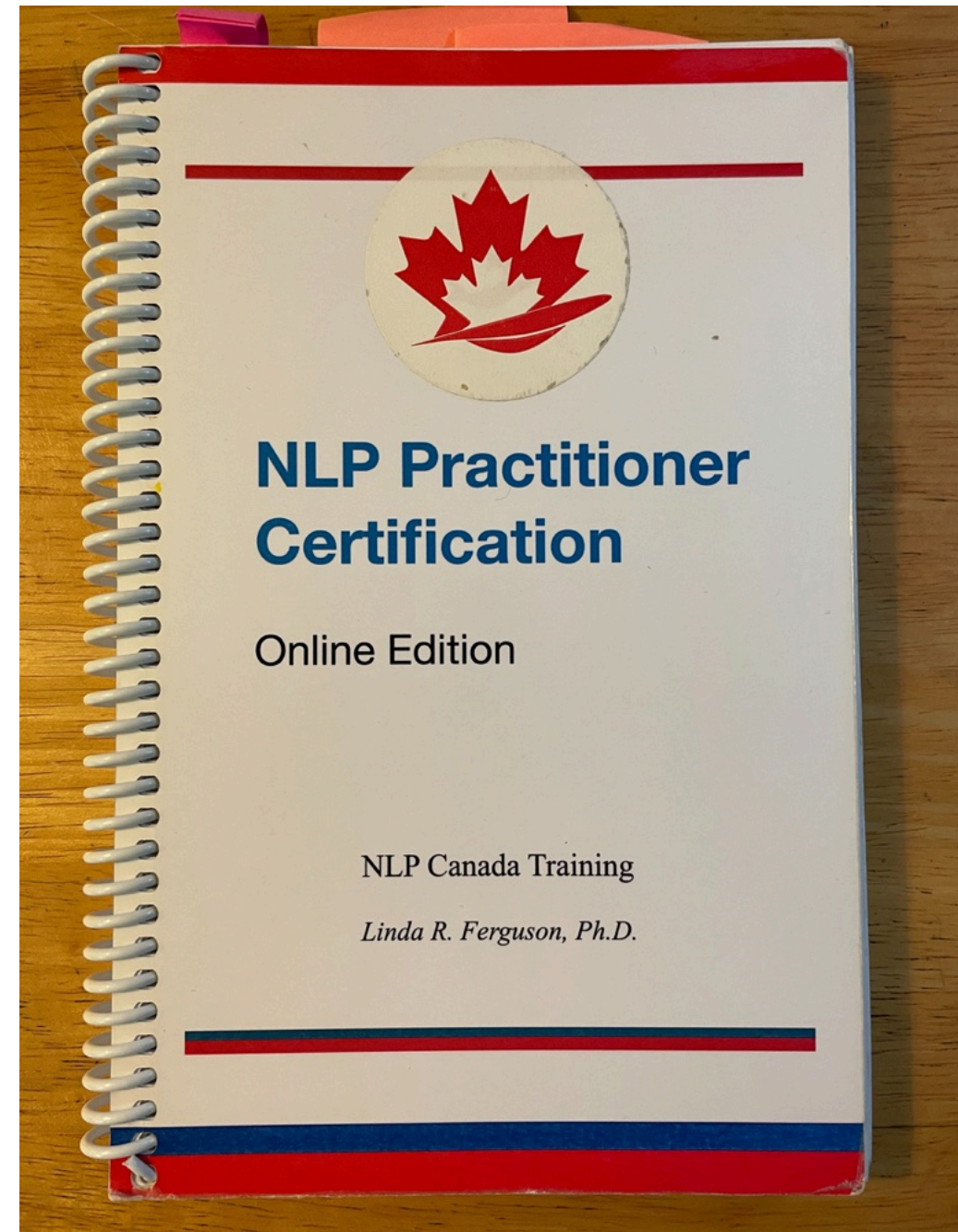
We have identified 5 tools that you can use when you need to make a change in yourself, your communication, or your situation. You can change your intention, attention, feelings, relationships or language.

Any change you make, any use of a tool, will also change the way you are thinking, feeling, and behaving.

But tools require practice. They don't work unless you do.

NLP Certifications

The best way to improve any skill is to practice in lots of different ways. Our practitioner course is designed to introduce you to more conscious applications of each of these tools for shaping yourself and influencing others.



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