

# NLEN VERSUS Gremlin

HOW TO WIN THE TUG OF WAR  
BETWEEN MOTIVATION AND DETERRENTS  
TO LIVE FULLY AND PURPOSEFULLY

## ABSTRACT

So, you want to bring about change in your life or achieve those elusive goals.

You feel you've got what it takes, but there is something holding you back from making it happen. This paper can help you get on the winning team in the tug of war between good intentions and saboteurs.

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# **NLEN\* VERSUS Gremlin**

\*NLEN, pronounced *en-lin*, is the acronym for “Near-Life Experience Narrative”

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**Creating success is a tug of war  
between your mind  
and your heart—  
your fears and your dreams.  
If your fears win, you lose.**

*- Robert G. Allen -*

## Explanation of key terms used in this paper

- Gremlin:** An imaginary, mischievous sprite regarded as responsible for an unexplained problem or fault; any cause of trouble, difficulties, etc. (adapted from dictionary.com)
- NLE:** Acronym for **Near-Life Experience**. An **NLE** is an occasion when you are **in flow**, or **in the zone**, or having a **peak experience**; when you're performing an activity and your mind is fully focused, wholly involved in what you're doing and you are feeling high levels of energy and enjoyment while performing the activity. You're totally absorbed in the moment and are unaware of the passage of time. This is an experience when you come nearest to achieving fullness of life.
- NLEN:** (Pronounced *en-lin*, rhyming with gremlin) Acronym for **Near-Life Experience Narrative**. **NLEN** is the story that reveals your life purpose, your true calling; the composite of your NLEs over your lifetime.

## Introduction

There are times in our lives when we feel highly driven to achieve desired outcomes, whether at work, home or sport. Perhaps you've been motivated by an amazing speaker, a great coach, an enlightening self-help book or an exciting training program. You started off gung-ho and make steady, satisfying advances for a bit. But then, before you succeed at fully realizing your goal, you lose your moxie and are pulled back to where you started from, or worse. It's like a tug of war between motivation and deterrents.

**Tug of war** is a sport that pits two groups against each other in a test of strength. Teams pull on opposite ends of a rope, vying to bring the rope a certain distance in their direction. Raw muscle power helps. But the cooperation and "rhythm" of team members working together plays an equally important — if not more important — role.

In the Tug of War of Life—where motivators are pulling on one end of the rope and deterrents are pulling on the opposite end—it is essential to have powerful, motivational team mates like an inspiring speaker, coach, book or role model. However, their power may be sporadic and short-lived, as perhaps you've experienced. To achieve sustained motivation, you need to *find the rhythm* that ensures your motivators are pulling most powerfully in sync. This means finding motivations that are in alignment with your life purpose.

*When your motivators are pulling in rhythm in the direction of your life purpose, you overpower your deterrents and achieve your goals.*

## What can you do to ensure your motivators consistently win the Tug of War so you can achieve your goals and live fully and purposefully?

- (1) **Find powerful motivators** that will pull cooperatively as a team in the direction you want to go.
- (2) **Find the rhythm** for them to pull most strongly and sustainably in unison.
- (3) **Diminish the deterrents.**

### Step 1: Find powerful motivators

So where are these powerful motivators? They're in Near-Life Experiences (NLEs). As more fully defined above, NLEs are the occasions in your life when you've felt most fully alive. Each NLE holds a clue as to what it is that makes you feel nearest to experiencing life at its fullest (without the help of mind-altering substances).

This first step involves identifying such occasions without making any inferences about them.

It may be helpful to chunk down your search for NLEs by focussing your attention on one period of your life at a time, starting at the present and working backwards (or visa versa). Or perhaps it will work better for you to let the NLEs randomly rise to the surface of your consciousness from whenever in your life. A NLE may be blatant or subtle, of short or protracted duration. Do not attempt to force the NLEs from memory; invite them to surface as they will. When an NLE comes to mind, record it on your tablet, in a scrapbook or on a sticky note.

In your note-taking, briefly describe what the NLE was and how you felt while experiencing it. At what age in your life you had the NLE is not critical.

Take as much time as needed until you feel satisfied with your capture. It may take a few days or weeks. The NLEs may arise in a flurry or intermittently.

To illustrate this step, I've chosen some of my own NLEs to share and have presented them in chronological order from my distant to more recent past:

- *NLE: Alone on a frozen pond in a field performing what, to the little-girl-me, was a perfectly choreographed ice-skating routine, over and over until I suddenly realized mid-afternoon had given way to dusk.*  
*Feeling: Energized, by delivering beautiful performances to my imaginary audience.*

- *NLE: In the summer after I began elementary school, teaching my two—somewhat reluctant—preschool brothers in a home classroom I'd set up, complete with desks and a chalkboard, as well as readers and math books I'd created.*  
*Feeling: Rewarded, by conveying new learning.*
- *NLE: Performing in the public speaking contests in elementary school.*  
*Feeling: Connected, by sharing knowledge and ideas with the audience.*
- *NLE: Penning poetry on high school summer weekends, primarily for a favourite English teacher.*  
*Feeling: Immersed, by getting lost deep in the compositions.*
- *NLE: Spending an inordinate amount of time in the lab for my university cartography course to produce the most effective, useful maps possible.*  
*Feeling: Greatly satisfied, by creating practical works of art.*
- *NLE: Writing recommendation reports for committees and council.*  
*Feeling: Challenged, by writing to produce articulate and compelling content.*
- *NLE: Preparing material for personal development presentations to the staff in the work unit I led.*  
*Feeling: Fulfilled, by creating potentially positive learning experiences for them.*

When you feel all your accessible NLEs have surfaced for the time being, organize them in one place so you can easily consider them in relation to each other.

## Step 2: Find the rhythm and enhance motivation

“Rhythm” is defined as a strong, regular, repeated pattern of movement or sound. When a team of rowers in a dragon boat race finds its rhythm, the racing speed is maximized. When a tug-of-war team pulls in rhythmic unison, the pulling power is greatly enhanced.

This step involves finding the rhythm—the strong, repeated pattern—in the NLEs and associated feelings you described. It’s about writing your Near-Life Experience Narrative (NLEN).

*Positive feelings are what motivate you.* In NLEs, your feelings are so intensely positive that you enter a flow state. You’re energized, totally focused and 100 per cent motivated. You are enjoying yourself at a peak level. Now it’s time to decipher what those feelings are collectively telling you, strongly and repeatedly.

This step in the process is analogous to putting together the pieces in a picture puzzle. At first glance, it’s difficult to see the big picture with the pieces scattered about the tabletop. But when you look at the pieces more closely and start fitting the pieces together, the image begins to emerge.

Again, to illustrate this step, here is the process I went through to write my NLEN.

*I reviewed my collection of NLEs. At first glance, I did not see a connection between skating, teaching, poetry writing, map making and my other NLEs. On the surface, these are not related activities. So, I looked more closely. What is their commonality?*

*And then it dawned on me.*

*Creativity! All my NLEs were acts of creation of some sort or other— whether it was a physical routine, speaking, writing or drawing.*

*However, almost everything we do has a creative component to it by virtue of the “doing.” There must be more. With further contemplation, I saw it.*

*Sharing! In some way or another, the NLEs involve sharing with others. So, it’s creating for others that motivates me. Got it!*

*But still, I felt there was more my NLEs had to tell me, and I continued to consider. What is the “why” behind me sharing creativity with others? The answer came.*

*Fostering! Virtually all my creations for sharing were made to foster joy or learning or awareness or growth. I felt compelled to put my “all” into my creations because I wanted them to be as effective and as high quality as possible to enhance the recipients’ experience.*

*Fostering through sharing my creativity is my rhythm—the strong, regular, repeated pattern. By understanding my rhythm, I could then articulate my NLEN:*

*I have become increasingly aware that I am most happy when I am involved in tasks that have elements of creativity, sharing and fostering. Therefore, my life purpose is to foster the growth and development of others through creative sharing. When I align my intentions and goals with this life purpose, I am powerfully and sustainably motivated to succeed, because in pursuing these goals I am becoming who I am meant to be.*

Like the first step, how long it takes to complete this second step varies from person to person. For some, it will take hours. For others, weeks. The human brain is rigged to discern patterns, so let it do what comes naturally. Try not to influence it to see patterns you want to see.

This awareness from my NLEN enhanced my motivation and empowered me to act on my desire to train as a life coach, take early retirement from my 40-year real estate career in the corporate world, and pursue my passion as a motivational speaker, trainer and coach. I now knew—or more accurately, felt in both my head and heart—that these goals were aligned with my authentic self that had shown up periodically throughout my life in the form of NLEs.

Why couldn’t I see this earlier in life? Why didn’t I have the courage and confidence to pursue my dream years ago? Besides not having my rhythm, what was deterring me? Let’s find out.

### Step 3: Diminish the deterrents

Get the gremlins! To refresh your memory, gremlins are those imaginary, mischievous little creatures regarded as being the cause for an unexplained problem, trouble or difficulty. They're the ones on the other end of the rope, pulling against you in the Tug of War of Life.

Steps 1 and 2 focussed on enhancing the power of motivation by discerning the clues in your NLEs and identifying your rhythm in your NLEN. Step 3 is about disempowering your opponents. Although attacking the other team in a game of tug of war would most likely get you disqualified, attacking the gremlins in the Tug of War of Life isn't just allowed, it's crucial.

You can develop a great team of motivators pulling in rhythm in the direction of your life purpose, but even with that enhanced power and strength, if the gremlins on the other end of your rope are powerful, you will expend a lot of valuable time and energy pulling against them. They will slow you down, perhaps keeping you stuck in one place.

What exactly are these gremlins? They are your self-saboteurs: your limiting self-beliefs; your fear of failure or success; your perfectionism; your unawareness; your attempts to meet other people's expectations of you; your societal, cultural, family, religious, gender, environmental constraints. Because of our varying nature/nurture backgrounds, the gremlin team pulling against you may look very different than mine. However, whatever team of gremlins you're up against, they work together to keep you unaware of your real-self strengths and undermine your courage, self-confidence, self-esteem and self-love.

So how do we out-pull our gremlins? This is a life-long endeavour. It takes commitment and a willingness to peel back the layers to see what lies beneath. It is necessary to name a gremlin, before it can be diminished. And because gremlins are often born back in the mist of the very earliest years on your life, it can sometimes take a long time to recognise a gremlin for what it is.

But don't be discouraged. Once the process of naming and diminishing gremlins begins, the weakened counter-pulling on your life rope becomes immediately noticeable. Making headway is a rewarding feeling, however modest it may be in the beginning. Making a little headway is immeasurably better than remaining stuck in place, and disempowering the gremlin team empowers the motivation team. Diminishing the deterrents requires patience and celebration of each small victory.

To illustrate this step, I've summarized my efforts to disempower some of the gremlins in my life in the following table. This table is the tip of the iceberg. What lies beneath it are many years of self-discovery work to foster self-awareness.



The "counter-pull" I noticed	Gremlin Name	How I'm disempowering the Gremlin
<p>If I try something new I might fail, so I shouldn't risk it. I've failed before and it hurts!</p>	<p>Fear of Failure</p>	<p>Remind myself that failures are lessons to grow on. Experiencing a failure doesn't make me a failure. It makes me wiser for the lesson learned.</p>
<p>What if I actually succeed at this and my life changes? People I care about might not like the new me.</p>	<p>Fear of Success</p>	<p>Remind myself that first and foremost I must be true to my authentic self. I am not here to live up to the expectations of others. I was made to be me. People who can relate will support the new me.</p>
<p>I'm still learning. I don't know all about my subject yet. I could do a disservice to someone through my ignorance.</p>	<p>Perfectionism</p>	<p>Remind myself that not even experts know it all. If I wait to know it all, I'll never get started. I remain cognisant of my abilities and act accordingly, ever pushing the boundaries of my comfort zone to grow better. I will always be a work in progress and I have something to offer to others who are also progressing.</p>

The "counter-pull" I noticed	Gremlin Name	How I'm disempowering the Gremlin
<p>I just don't have what it takes. Other people are so much more skilled.</p>	<p>Lack of Self-Confidence</p>	<p>See Fear of Failure. Then remind myself that I have a perspective and a way of communicating that no one else does. And confidence only grows by continually pushing the boundaries of my comfort zone as my competency increases. To do this, I will continuously seek opportunities to learn. Remind myself of my previous successes, however small they may seem.</p>
<p>I'm not very likeable. I don't have anything special to offer. People won't want to engage with me. I might keep getting rejected.</p>	<p>Lack of Self-Esteem</p>	<p>Remind myself that people don't like inauthenticity and feel most comfortable in the presence of someone who shows up as their real self. Not everyone will like my real self as there just are incompatible personalities, but people who find me relatable will engage.</p>

Be reminded that although, as per their definition, gremlins are imaginary, they sure as hell seem very real. That's the curse and the blessing of the brain's super ability to imagine. As you work to diminish the gremlins, you will be empowered by reminding yourself that your gremlins exist only as long as you imagine them to be counter-pulling on your rope. The sooner you begin telling your "Fear of Failure" gremlin that (s)he's only a figment of your imagination, and you start imagining what it feels like to embrace failure as an opportunity to grow, your imagining will nurture your belief.

You don't have to complete Steps 1 and 2 to work on Step 3. You may find it useful to capture and organize your thoughts in a table format as I've shown. As with the capture of NLEs, the moment you feel a "counter-pull" (negative self-talk perhaps, or a negative emotion such as shame, guilt, fear, embarrassment, anxiety, etc.), jot down your feeling on your tablet, notepad or sticky note. The feeling may rise to your consciousness through deliberate consideration or randomly as you go about your day. Awareness is the first essential element to working on this step. As you become aware of your gremlins, attempt to name them whenever possible. If you find its name, what reminders can you give yourself to stop imagining that the gremlin is real?

**Often a tug-of-war team will have a coach** to help the competitors find their rhythm and overpower their opponents on the other end of the rope. Similarly, in order to most effectively work these steps in the **NLEN versus Gremlin Tug of War**, you may benefit from the services of a professional counsellor and/or coach.

If you find it emotionally challenging to name deep-seated gremlins, or the exercise leads you to wanting to address unresolved matters from your past, counselling may assist. If you're looking for guidance and support in finding and interpreting the clues in your NLEs, or in stating your life purpose—your calling—in your NLEN, coaching is what you're after.

## About the Author: Annie Gyg

My name is Annie Gyg (pronounced “jig”). Drawing on my personal experiences as a caregiver to my adult daughter during her mental health crisis and alcoholism, I help others facing the challenges of caregiving.

Although caring for a loved one in crisis was a distressing time, it was also enlightening. Today, I’m passionate about paying forward the empowering, life-changing learning that has brought me enduring peace of mind and happiness.



### What’s in a name?

When I was a child, my now departed dad used to call me “Annie Get Your Gun” (after the popular 1950 musical western). I loved that nickname and shortened it to Annie Gyg, adopting it as my pen and stage name.

I came to see “GUN” as the acronym for “genuine, unique, nature.” Once I reconnected with my authentic, one-of-a-kind self — or, got my GUN — I began to experience a level of happiness and fulfillment I could not have imagined. You might say getting my GUN empowered me to take aim at my life purpose.

### Success through self-care, authenticity and empathy

I credit my current love of life largely to overcoming my own mental and emotional struggles while caring for someone suffering from mental illness and addiction.

For me, the lessons from those challenging life experiences were blessings in disguise. They taught me how to healthfully care for myself while caring for my daughter in crisis. They also taught me how to successfully and effectively lead with authenticity and empathy in my former corporate management role, while fostering the professional and personal development of my team members.

Those experiences — combined with a burning desire to support others on their life journey — led me to become certified as a life coach (ECPC). Now retired from the corporate world, I’m enjoying the rewards of pursuing my passion as a trainer, motivational speaker and life coach.

A mother of four adult children, I live outside of Guelph, Ontario, immersed in nature, where my closest neighbours are chickens, horses and trees.

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