

## FAST Pathways Example Successes – Resolving Work Absences

A few years ago, Donna had breast cancer. It was diagnosed early, and a single round of treatment was completely successful. But she was convinced it was going to come back. She'd had lengthy conversations with both her doctor and her counsellor, with both of them trying to reassure her. Logically all the facts and figures made perfect sense - it was very unlikely to come back, but the deep-rooted fear refused to budge. Her noticing was intensely tuned to any references to cancer (there are quite a lot to pick up on), and any mention of it could set off the spiralling panic that she'd go through it all again, and next time she might not be so lucky.

It was particularly bad in the run-up to any of her routine check-ups – her sleep would be destroyed (and the more tired she was, the more intense the fears became), she'd be unable to answer the phone just in case it was her doctor's office - even before her appointment, let alone while she was waiting for any results, and she'd end up taking anything up to a couple of weeks off work because she could barely function. It was ruling her life. Over the course of a week or so, she spent less than 2 hours exploring the FAST Pathways skills.



She learned to stop the enormous, scary pictures in her mind's eye, and to hear cancer as a word, free from any particular associations. Her sleep settled back to normal, and rather than constantly trying to wrestle the fear back out of her awareness, she could comfortably focus on whatever was important at the time. She stopped thinking about cancer altogether - it became something which had happened to her, and the experience of having got through it became one she could draw strength from.

It's understandable that Donna was afraid while she was going through her treatment, but once the situation had changed, her mind was refusing to give up those fear patterns. And no amount of logic or reassurance was going to shift that pattern. But by working inside the not-on-purpose thinking itself, where the habit patterns were lodged, she was able to resolve the debilitating problem in just a few hours. A few weeks later, she put it fully to the test - a close colleague had died of cancer, and instead of having to go into hiding for weeks, convinced that she'd be next, she was able to go to the funeral. As her next routine check up approached, she felt fine about it.

## A Serious Early Warning

Lesley runs a very successful Estate Agency - driven and ambitious, she thrives on the pressure of doing the best for their clients, but her increasing stress was causing what she described as tunnel vision. She was always on the look out for the next problem, seeing them before they were even there, believing that it was the only way to stop anything from going wrong. And let's face it, with house moves there's

a lot which can go wrong! She'd started to gloss over any good feedback, giving herself a very polarised view of the world (thinking that was being proactive); and felt she was letting down her staff as a leader by having a short fuse and not being available enough to support them as they needed, which was further adding to the worries of things going wrong. It was becoming a particularly vicious cycle.

As an escape she was drinking more and over eating, and often experienced dizziness and tingling fingers. Fairly often, she'd have to cancel all her appointments and go home to lie down, which was having an even bigger impact on her ability to deliver. The physical symptoms took a big turn for the worse when her vision distorted so badly that she had to pull over her car, and be taken straight to hospital. The medical staff said it was an early warning.




She thought feeling both poorly and frantic all the time was just a natural side-effect of the drive and focus which she so valued in herself, and wasn't prepared to take any risk of lessening. Which is why she'd lived with the escalating effects for so long.

We embedded some basic skills for getting her system off high-alert, enabling her logical thinking to get back into the driving seat and do what it does best. Within a few hours, she described feeling cleansed and clarified. It gave her back the ability to stand back and look at the risks and options, instead of always looking for the next big problem. The physical symptoms subsided, and stopped having to take time off. She also stopped being snappy with her staff, and was able to comfortably let go of the unhelpful coping mechanisms. All without lessening her drive or ambition. Instead of being something which floors her, stress is back to being her fuel.

### History Repeating

Stress had been a big issue for Alastair in the past. After several years of battling with it in a very demanding role, he'd had to walk away from a successful career as a Management Consultant, suffering from burn-out. It wasn't an easy decision, giving up the career he loved, but he felt it was the only way to stop the stress from destroying him.

Alistair was introduced to FAST Pathways by his GP, as the end of his year of intensive training to become a teacher approached. He was really enjoying the work, and found the teaching itself came quite naturally. But with frequent assignments and observations / assessments, each one of which could determine whether he'd be allowed to continue on the development programme, the pressure was still significant. So stress and anxiety were still a big part of life.



His sleep quality was consistently poor, and he'd had to put everything but his training on hold to focus all his resources on getting through the year. But it was still escalating. It came to a head when he got so anxious that he got no sleep at all, and had to call in sick. Lurking at the back of his mind, there was always the possibility of history repeating itself and having to give up a second career, which was incredibly frightening. The best he believed he could hope for was better coping skills, enabling him to get through it all a little more smoothly, without the constant fear of tipping back over the edge.

After just one session exploring the skills, his sleep started to improve, and he was more comfortable facing the daily challenges. The biggest differences were being able to stay focused on the content (rather than possible consequences) of each assignment, and to stop thinking about it once he'd put in the necessary work. Feeling like he had a little more breathing space, he started to explore some of the deeper underlying issues, and cleared away the guilt he'd been carrying about long-past decisions, which was also a big contributor to his anxiety. He found his results extraordinary - after a few hours learning the skills, he was no longer coping – that old, familiar distress which he'd started to believe was an integral part of him, simply wasn't there. Since then, life's stayed anxiety-free, and he's loving his new career.

### Tiny Triggers

Louisa had always prided herself at toughing her way through her life's many challenges. She has a good network of friends and supportive colleagues, and plenty experience of keeping going when things got tough. Until the day she went to visit her Dad, and found him dead on the kitchen floor. The medics said it would have been quick - he hadn't suffered, and there was nothing anyone could have done. But that image of him seemed etched in her mind. She was having multiple flash backs and panic attacks every day, often bursting into tears, and finding it very difficult to be around other people.

She was having to avoid all the places which she associated with her Dad, but pretty much anything could set it off. She'd taken off quite a bit of time from work because she just didn't know when it was going to hi-jack her, and when it did, those intense emotions could last for days. People kept telling her to give it time, it'd pass, but months later the intensity hadn't reduced at all. She felt she'd lost all the hopefulness which used to keep her going.

Louisa's very first FAST Pathways technique brought the emotions of that memory from a discomfort level 10 (as bad as it could possibly get), down to zero. She could still remember exactly what had happened, but it was more like watching it in a movie – a past experience, instead of one that she kept on re-living. As she added more skills, the flashbacks stopped. One by one she was able to go to the places she'd been avoiding, and she came off her sleeping tablets. She began grieving normally, finding that many of the happy memories of times with her Dad surfaced instead of being suppressed. And instead of being too much to manage, work became something to immerse back into, a valuable route to moving forwards.