



## FAST Pathways Example Successes – Confidence and Performing at Their Best

Jane's a nurse with 30 years experience. After almost 15 years working with the same team, she'd moved to a new department, and was struggling to settle in. She was working with some big egos, and a couple of times when she'd shared her opinion, she'd been cut short. She'd tried to set it aside and carry on working like she was used to, but she was finding it increasingly difficult to speak up about anything – even when she felt that the decisions being made weren't the best for the patient. Without sharing her experience, she was just a safe pair of hands doing what she was told.

Her initial description of the stress was feeling disrespected and under-valued, and missing the collaboration that she used to enjoy so much. But when it came to doing anything about it, that left her stuck. She couldn't go back to her old department, or single-handedly change the new one's culture. So she delved further.... What she could do something about was relevant information not being considered in important decisions, because she wasn't sharing it. And that was deeply frustrating, especially as her patients' outcomes mattered more than what anyone thought of her.

Being cut down had felt personal, but she realised that it wasn't about her. Her new department's culture had a strong hierarchy, where qualifications had traditionally been valued more than experience. But what everyone had in common was the desire to do their best for the patients, so she used this as her foundation, switching her focus to what was working rather than what wasn't. And starting from what they had in common made the gap feel less scary.

Once she'd singled out frustrated as the problem's main emotion, she took a few minutes to explore how that feeling was showing up. She imagined herself being right back inside a recent situation where she'd backed out of speaking up. The first thing she noticed was the voice in her mind, rattling out all the ways in which she could be cut down. How they wouldn't listen, how rude they might be, and how bad it would feel. That voice was loud and domineering, blocking out whatever else she'd been trying to think, and scaring her into keeping her ideas to herself.

So she imagined that voice had controls like a radio. She turned down its volume, and as it got quiet, she softened its tonality, making it less domineering. As the voice changed, she noticed the hot, tight knot of frustration which had formed in her stomach starting to cool and loosen. Having brought herself out of that uncomfortable fight-flight, she worked out how to share her information without it sounding like she was telling anyone that she thought they were wrong. Then to help her mind learn that new pattern for itself, she imagined it all again, repeating that same process with three other recent situations. In all, it took around 15 minutes.

The following week she called to tell me that not only had she spoken up twice that day, it was so natural that she hadn't even noticed herself doing it. A colleague with whom she'd shared her problem had spotted the change and pointed it out to her. She still experiences those gaps of 'something doesn't feel right about this decision', but that guides her to pinpointing what might have been missed and making sure it gets considered, which is much better for both her and her patients.

## Every Silver Lining had a Cloud

James could easily pick out all the ways in which anything could go wrong, so he worried a lot. Sometimes it got quite tiring, having so many worries fighting it out for his attention. But he'd developed an array of coping skills, keeping enough of a lid on it to function day to day. He kept himself to himself in work, avoiding unnecessary conversation, and doing the bare minimum to keep his boss off his back. He was managing, until his wife dropped the bombshell that she was thinking of leaving him because of it. It shattered his world, making him determined to change.

He started searching for reasons why he saw only the negatives, believing (as many people do) that he had to start by understanding where it came from. But as usually happens, his search was long, frustrating, fruitless and completely unnecessary. He tried positive thinking, forcing a different spin on his natural thoughts, but it was hard work and never lasted. Then a friend's chance comment led him to FAST Pathways. Rather than trying to work out where the negative thoughts were coming from, or trying to over-write them, he spent a little time exploring how they actually showed up – the way he was talking to himself, the pictures he was making in his mind's eye, and the exact sensations in his body which the negative emotion generated. He identified his personal process for getting anxious.

Then one piece at a time, he began changing that process. He'd tried (and failed) many times to change what his mind-voice was saying, so he experimented with different ways to change the way it sounded instead. After playing around with different speeds, volume, accents and sound-effects, he noticed the biggest difference when he converted his very negative voice to quietly bored. It became like a radio playing in the background, still using its same old words, but so much easier to ignore.

Then he imagined an anxiety dial, which would pop into his mind when he started to feel uncomfortable, allowing him to turn down the feeling. He designed a few more tweaks, and ran through them a few times to train his brain in the different ways of doing things. Over the coming days, he noticed a huge release from the catastrophising that his wife might leave. He was still scared, but he started to feel more hopeful – something he realised he'd not felt about anything for a very long time. Worries still popped up, but they were less intense, and easier to ignore. He felt like he'd cleared space inside his thinking, to engage more with the world around him.

He chatted with colleagues, finding out things that in years of working together, they'd never realised they had in common. His boss saw a big difference, as he started to come forward with ideas instead of grumbling away in the background about anyone else's (his boss later admitted that he used to dread having to tell him that anything was changing!). And instead of just slogging through each day, he started to enjoy finding new ways to add to and apply his many years of experience on the job.

It wasn't without its setbacks. Especially if he was tired, he'd notice the old patterns starting to creep back. But once he'd realised they weren't part of the fabric of who he is, they were so much easier to dislodge again. I don't know how things worked out with his marriage, but the last time we spoke, he knew life could be OK either way.

## Silencing the Inner Distractor

Kelly's another great example of someone who thrives on stress. She manages a busy hotel, and she loves it. It can get pretty chaotic – when something goes wrong, it's got to be sorted NOW!! She'd go home only once she was sure everything was running like clockwork, so long hours were her norm.

When she had her son, she took off a whole year, absorbed in being Mum. She saw his very first smile, light up his face. When he started to walk, she was there to pick him up and encourage him. She was the one retrieving things from his mouth that he really shouldn't be chewing, and playing aeroplanes with those last couple of spoonfuls of lunch. That year flew. In what seemed like a couple of weeks, it was time to go back to work. And that's when the trouble started.....


Because she was so used to being with him, she'd spend her day constantly thinking about her son. Wondering what he was doing, and whether he was OK. Watching the clock, worrying whether she'd get everything done in time to collect him. Because now, she had to leave on time. She was constantly distracted, stopping her from multi-tasking like she used to, slowing her down. It was soooooo frustrating!!!

Then she'd spend her evening wondering whether the phone was going to ring with a problem from her team. Or even worse, what if there was a problem, and they didn't ring – and she'd walk into chaos the next day. Maybe she should phone them, just in case. But then she'd be checking up on them, and that's not fair. But, well, oh maybe just a quick call? And so all that distraction came home with her too. Whether she was at work or at home, her mind was in the other. She felt like she was being torn between two things which both really matter to her. The more she tried to talk herself round, reassure herself, or 'forget about it', the worse it got. That constant churning, round and round in her mind. And frankly, she was knackered.



Anything stressful is only a problem when you keep on thinking about it. Kelly had been trying not to – she kept trying to put it out of her mind, but she couldn't. Her mind was persistently holding on to the patterns of making her feel bad. So that's what we changed – and it took minutes. Using Helium

She imagined having a big, shiny balloon full of it. And when that voice in her mind started spouting its disaster stories about whatever was going wrong without her, she'd give it Helium. So that instead of sounding worried or critical and judgmental, that voice got really squeaky. And the more it tried to sound serious, the higher it squeaked. It sounded ridiculous, and instead of making her feel bad, it just made her laugh. She even kept over the last of the balloon, so she could let it go with a fffffffft!



She only imagined it a couple of times, and all that mind nagging stopped. She could be where she was. Fully. And that felt soooooo good. To immerse back into her work on absolute top form, comfortable to leave or delegate anything she'd not finished at the end of the day. To go home to real time with her son. His tea, his bath, his bedtime story.

Helium. It wasn't even real Helium (but then all those possible disasters she was playing out in her mind weren't real either). A creative way to clear out that really unhelpful pattern which her auto-thinking had been running.

### **From Party to Presenting**

Charlotte first came to see me because she wanted to go to the work party – a fairly lavish annual event for about 300 people. She'd worked for the company for a few years and had always been too anxious to go, so she'd spend the whole week following each event beating herself up for missing out again. She came across as outgoing and self-assured, but inside, she was becoming increasingly anxious around groups of people: If she went to the restaurant for lunch and more than a handful of people were already there, she'd turn round and walk back out. Good for calorie control, but not much else....

Within about half an hour of starting to explore the FAST Pathways skills, Charlotte had switched off her mind's old anxiety habits, and could comfortably imagine being at the party. She started to think about the event differently, designing it in her imagination to go exactly as she wanted. A few days later, she went to the party and thoroughly enjoyed it, without a hint of the anxiety she used to experience. She didn't half feel proud of herself, being able to join in with all the after-party stories.

So having proved to herself how easily she can change an unhelpful mind-habit, she decided to tackle an even more disruptive one. Every now and again she's asked to give a presentation in work. It used to prey on her mind for weeks, getting progressively worse and eating up endless hours of preparation, trying to rote learn what she wanted to say and research answers to every possible question, in the hope of taking off some of the pressure. It didn't. By the day itself, she couldn't eat, she felt sick (a couple of times she'd even been physically sick), and was convinced that her voice would stop working, or her mind would go blank. This was stage fright on a grand scale, and it showed.

Remembering the exact way she'd changed her thinking about the party, she took the same steps with presenting. Programming in a natural, effortless comfort, she started small, presenting a progress update in their next team meeting. She then progressed to inter-site functional meetings, and was soon enjoying sharing her team's work on the International stage. Noticing the difference, her boss and colleagues started opening up even more opportunities for her to showcase their work. Presentations have become something she actively seeks out and looks forward to.