

FAST Pathways Example Successes – Preventing a Resignation

Amber sometimes needs to travel abroad for work, which would be fine, except that she was terrified of flying. She'd already resigned one job because she couldn't deliver what was needed without travelling, and her new employer was starting to make more and more requests for her to visit other European projects. She was too embarrassed to tell them about her problem, and was again considering handing in her notice.



She'd tried toughing it out, and always had a horrendous time with the panic she experienced – the distress amplified even further by the embarrassment she felt, as she put it 'freaking out' in front of strangers. She'd also tried to overcome it with sheer force of will, booking a holiday with friends, in the hope that being surrounded by a supportive entourage would help. It didn't. She got as far as the airport check-in before she couldn't handle it any further, and went home losing all the money she'd paid for the holiday. And each time she 'failed' it amplified the feeling that this thing was insurmountable.

It wasn't being in the air which bothered her - it was about not being able to control it, and not being able to return home to 'safety' should she feel like she needed to. Feeling trapped..... She kept telling herself that it was only a short flight, that she should be able to handle (which wasn't helping either). Luckily, she was able to feel almost as much discomfort by imagining a trip as she would if it was really happening, which gave her lots to work with. She spent an hour or so, working out each of the elements of that fear, and how to change it inside her thinking.

Usually it all happened too fast for her to be aware of what was going on, so she switched it into slow motion, to figure out how that fight-flight flood built up. She experimented with a few different ways to change that process, and when she'd found the most effective, she repeated it a few times for her brain to learn the new sequence, over-writing the old panic habit. Once her body was back to comfortable, she imagined every element of the journey – getting up and dressed, the journey to the airport, the queues at check-in and security, and all the little details of the flight itself, tweaking any discomfort to stop it from escalating.

A few days later she travelled to Lithuania. She felt a little anxious in the airport, but managed its effects without it hi-jacking her as it used to. By the time she reached the place itself she was feeling fine. And once the first trip was under her belt, and she'd proved to herself that the old habits were gone, she's been able to take many others in complete comfort.



An Emotional Allergic Reaction

Angela worked for one of the Organisations I was supporting with implementing Operational Excellence. She'd been hand-picked from a comprehensive recruitment process – it had taken ages to find the right person, and a couple of months into the role she was absolutely loving it. So I was really surprised when on one of my visits, she took me aside to tell me she was about to leave.

She'd got off on the wrong foot with one individual, a difference of opinion which had escalated until they simply couldn't be civil to each other. And unfortunately he was the owner of the business – let's call him Len. Her boss had tried to help, giving them both feedback and trying to mentor them through it, but it had only got worse. Now Len wasn't the easiest of people – I had a near run-in with him myself. But Angela was having what I can only describe as an emotional allergic reaction to him. It was off the scale. She said that being anywhere near him made her feel physically sick.

She'd asked to be excused from any meetings he was attending, which was really getting in the way of what she was trying to deliver. She'd keep tabs on wherever he was in the building so that she could be somewhere else, but that meant that on the days when he was on site, she was so distracted by trying to avoid him that she got next to nothing done, and still went home feeling absolutely drained. As often happens in fight-flight reactions, her creative thinking had shut down, leaving her able to see only two possible solutions to the situation. Get him to behave differently (which no one had been able to), or leave the job she loved.

We grabbed a quiet few minutes, and I talked her through the FAST Pathways Shield technique – it's one which has helped overcome all sorts of difficult relationships, professional and personal; and she was quickly able to imagine herself in his presence without any discomfort. I could tell she wasn't convinced that it'd work in practice, but it's not that on-purpose, analytical thinking where the skills have the biggest impact.

On my next site visit a couple of weeks later, I was pleased to see that she was still there. At the first opportunity, she took me aside again to ask what I'd said to Len. I was a little confused, because I'd had no contact with him for weeks. As she put it "He's stopped being a prat", and the only way she could see that having happened was if I'd somehow managed to convince him to change his behaviour. Of course, it wasn't him who'd changed, it was her – but because her Shield was operating automatically, completely outside of her awareness, she hadn't realised.

Once she was no longer feeling threatened, she'd stopped the pre-emptive attacks, to which Len used to respond so badly. They'd found some common ground for communication, and two weeks in, it was gathering pace. By my final visit a couple of weeks later, all the hostilities were completely forgotten. She summed it up as "We'll never be drinking buddies, but he's actually OK. You've just got to know how to handle him". And with just those few minutes' guidance, she'd learned how to.