



The Big Blue Box Ltd

Stress - Change the Rules

There is often a moment in a career when the individual begins to realise that something isn't working, that what they have been doing so far suddenly it isn't working any more.

They believe the solution is to work harder, try again, do more, get tighter control. The individual becomes stressed and loses confidence.

This is a frequent problem for senior players – the old rules that got them to where they are now suddenly don't work. Sometimes the warning signs are missed, the message to change isn't heard, deeply rooted habits and beliefs conflict with any desire to change.

The Background

H manages a complex production process with close links to Sales and to customers. Her business structure is international and complex. We were introduced with a brief to help H to become more effective, less stressed and perhaps a little happier.

A key indicator would be to see her going home on time!

The Process

For our first meeting H was keen to meet off-site and away from colleagues.

Her objectives were to reduce her stress levels and get some work / life balance.

We passed the Chemistry Test and were quickly into the details. Stress was clearly an issue as the tears flowed early on.

'I must stop taking it home with me, I need to say 'no' to stuff... I need to delegate... I'm into the detail because that's my job... I just have to do it quicker!... I have training in customer service and that comes first in my view... I want to be able to deliver... the business needs a process - I have to make sense of what [the sales team] sell to the client –[I receive] a poor specification and no detail, so I have to spend time coaxing the detail out of them.'

Her role was fundamental to the production function, and it was becoming more pressured.

But H was personally involved in every project and her spirit of service was driving her. The rules that H had applied earlier in her career, and the values that she wanted to live and work with were now being challenged.

Having expressed her frustrations and discussed some simple actions, our first session concluded with H a little calmer.

Significantly, just days before our next session H emailed to say she was going to be unable to keep the appointment as the pressure of work and immediate deadlines was more urgent!

When we did meet, the session recovered the same complaints. The ideas that H had taken away from our first session had been set aside as the day to day pressure forced a return to the familiar habits.

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H was putting her personal development off and concentrating on the short term problems, she had made no changes.

It would require H to re-engage before progress could be made. In the conversation we identified that there were a significant number of other issues in H's life, each of which was creating anxiety, yet none of them was being resolved.

It seemed important that H should commit to making some progress where it was achievable, that she recognised an issue and resolved it. Some of her rules had to change.

We had a 'challenging' conversation.

The Outcomes

In our next session H reported on the actions she had taken.

*'I decided I could either get p***** off or make a difference!'*

H had a long commute each day - she decided to move home nearer to her work, this gave her more discretionary time every day.

'Moving home made me feel much more in control...happier...'

H had sleepless nights worrying about her problems.

'I tried making a list and it wasn't an immediate help, but when I looked back I could see I'd done it all...I'm sleeping better.'

She also developed a daily 'to do' list – crossing things off as they were completed.

She needed to free some of her time at work –

'I've changed my management style...I had no time for my team....now, I've let go of some control...I'm more determined when saying no! ... I've stretched more into planning... I want to move my job more from actually doing the work to managing through others.'

She increased her awareness of herself and others.

'I let work pressures get on top of me with the detriment to health and personal work/life balance... If the status quo had continued, the chance that I would have cracked and be signed off with stress was significant.'

'I had realised the impact my stressed behaviour was having on the people around me. Being aware of this has allowed me to put changes into place which after 2 weeks are already showing a positive impact on the people working for me.'

'I am definitely benefitting from the change.'

'The more I reflect the more I consider the changes I have made. There is still more to do but I am calmer at accepting that you can change things overnight and that subtle changes can lead to benefit in only a few weeks.'