



The Big Blue Box Ltd

Working Under Stress

When the tables are turned and you find yourself in a different place. This is about noticing what happens to one's own performance when under stress and tension.

I recently had an important 'retest' on my motorcycling 'Instructor' skills. This is not the most important thing in my life and nothing hugely significant happens if I pass or if I fail. I'm not a 'full time professional' trainer, so my career doesn't depend upon it.

Nevertheless I wanted to pass the retest, personal pride mainly, and it wouldn't be too good if I did fail as 'word would get round' about it. So it is fairly important.

As I began the test I had all the usual signs of nerves!

Tightness and dry mouth, rushed speech, pulse, sweaty palms, lack of clear thinking, feelings like panic.

Yet I have played this role many times and 'trained and tested' others on it.

Out on the bike and riding I relaxed a bit.

But I was aware of the tension in my back, arms and legs which translates into stiff movements and a jerky ride; not looking far enough forward down the road to see what is going on, and therefore a lack of planning.

Part of the retest is to 'debrief the rider' where I have to observe, identify, analyse and offer instruction on the 'rider's' ride - the rider being the examiner in a role play, acting out a typical riding style and its errors.

I could see the 'errors'.

I started my debrief with confidence and authority, but my normal 'coaching', questioning style has gone! I was clearly in 'Tell' style, perhaps because I wanted to make sure the examiner knew that I knew the answer.

Not too good. It's so easy to lose the plot when the stress and tension, and narrow 'Task' focus takes over.

The next bit of the test was a review of my own ride. And in this section I learned that concentration could drop in an instant. We rode through a complex junction, I focused on the past, reviewing my progress through the junction we had just gone through - and I miss-read the next section of road.

So now I had several things to beat myself up about, and my mind was not focusing on the need to plan ahead (and forget the past!).

As we finished the test I got off the bike thinking that was a pretty shabby ride. The examiner congratulated me on passing my test.

Stress had made me tighten up, I focused upon my errors and spoiled my concentration on the future.

The Big Blue Box Ltd

Contact: 1 The Laurels, Oatlands Drive, Weybridge, Surrey. KT13 9LF

Tel: voice/fax: 01932 843933 www.thebigbluebox.co.uk

Registered Office: Suite 1, Concept House, 23 Billet Lane, Hornchurch, Essex, RM11 1XP

Registered in England No: 4401635

Working Under Stress

My style degraded to one where I was less effective, but still felt in control.

Under stress, my performance was reduced, my perception of my own performance was significantly reduced, which only increased my stress and further reduced my performance.

There is something in this about 'realistic self assessment', and also about 'goal, target and standard setting'.

Everybody makes mistakes, the 'test' is not about being 'perfect' (perhaps that's my personal target) but in real life performance only has to be 'good enough'.

And in my coaching practice, I see this happen time and time again.

We might start with an 'Unrealistic self assessment' (too negative a view of ourselves), then we set ourselves unrealistic targets, and then we beat ourselves up for not achieving them.

Relax , it only has to be 'Good Enough'!