

Fear of Flying – The Sky is the Limit with NLP

Airline Captain and NLP Trainer *Elisabeth Tanum* is an expert in helping people cope with their fear of flying. Elisabeth has been flying Boeing 737 airliners as a professional pilot since she was 24, and at the age of 30 she was appointed Captain. From her work on the flight deck Elisabeth has had daily contact with people with a fear of flying. By adopting her expertise as an Airline Captain and Professional Coach, she is a great resource for anyone who wants a more comfortable flying experience. Elisabeth talks to *Rapport* about her work.



By Elisabeth Tanum



Most people have a fear of some kind, and the most common of all is the fear of flying. Around 60 per cent of air travellers inform that they experience some kind of discomfort when they are travelling by air. Around 10 per cent are so terrified that it's classified as a phobia.

Ten million business trips are cancelled each year and around 1 in 7 people in the western world have never been on an airplane due to fear of flying. As an Airline Captain I've had daily contact with people who have a fear of flying.

The degree of unease varies from being mildly anxious to petrified. The associated physical reactions like racing heart, sweaty palms, tears, feeling faint and shivering are all too often soothed by sedatives.

Statistics

Flying is the safest form of transport and should be an enjoyable experience. There are around 92,000 flights daily worldwide. According to International Air Transport Association (IATA), the number of fatalities due to aircraft accidents is averaged at about 700 per year over the last 10 years. In 2015, there was 1 accident per 3.1 million flights, which corresponds to 136 fatalities out of 3.5 billion passenger journeys. The risk of being involved in an aircraft accident is microscopic. Travelling by

road is a much greater risk. Though even if I explain down to the last detail about how safe air travel is, it is unlikely to help people as long as they feel unsafe.

Creating the fear

Nothing in life is to be feared – it is only to be understood.

Madame Curie

There are different reasons why people have a fear of flying. It could be an event that triggers it, and / or lack of knowledge.

Some people may start to worry about a flight weeks, maybe months prior to the day. It affects their quality of life. Others may start to feel anxious as they pack their suitcase, on their way to, or upon arrival at the airport.

Others have a strong sense of 'seeing is believing'. They understand why a car is moving, and why the boat is floating because they can see both the road and the sea. With flying their logic gives them a hard time; since air is invisible... there's nothing there to hold the aircraft up in the air...therefore the plane will fall down. Again this is linked to lack of knowledge, and this is where I apply my expertise.

Identify the fear

First, I ask clients to identify their fear.



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Is it a fear of crashing, a fear of dying or is the person anxious about feeling claustrophobic, experiencing a panic attack and / or losing control over their state, what I call 'Fear of the Fear'. The problem for many with a fear of flying is that they suffer under their own imagination. They see worst-case scenarios: the aircraft plummeting to the ground, fire, explosions, wings falling off, wreckage scattered for miles, death and destruction. An unfamiliar sound or turbulence can make someone believe that something is wrong and they 'just know' for certain that the aircraft is going to crash. The key is to control the imagination. The more you know, the less you leave to your imagination.

Breath is key

So, what are you in control of? You are not in control of the airplane, someone else is. You are also unable to remove yourself from the situation, and that in itself may potentially trigger a panic attack. What you are in control of is



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your feelings and your state. No one other than one's self can take responsibility for or control them. And the best and most effective way to do this is to first take control of your breathing! We all know what happens to the breath when we feel stressed and upset. Controlling the breath allows for much greater state control.

NLP

Fear is that unpleasant feeling that arises when you *think* you are in danger. So what I point out to my clients is it's not what you think – it's *how* you think about it.

Fear is not something we have – it's something we do. So how can people with a fear of flying experience relief with NLP without sedating themselves with pills, alcohol, etc?

When I was introduced to NLP, my mentor Gillian Godtfredsen gave me a resonating description of NLP: 'NLP is the study of the structure of subjective experience.' NLP taught me how we create our experience; and how the submodalities of our internal representations are crucial to state and physiology. So focusing on submodality changes is essential in my changework with clients.

In addition I use a number of other Classic Code and New Code techniques. One of which is Dynamic Spin Release, developed by Tim and Chris Hallbom in their work with health behaviour.

Personal mantra anchor

I often use the Pattern for De-identification conversationally. It's a super technique for loosening up tension and introducing humour. I follow up by teaching a breathing technique, e.g. using pacing and leading to enter a light trance then focusing on inhaling deeply and silently telling themselves 'I am', and on the deep exhale use an anchor word of the positive state they wish to experience when flying, such as 'calm' or 'peaceful'.

By continually repeating this slowly and effortlessly they create their own personal mantra.

Talk through

I deliver the technical aspects of flying combined with NLP and coaching techniques. ►



- ▶ Together with Nordic Coach & NLP Academy I have developed a concept where I talk clients through a typical flight, explaining all the sounds and sensations they are likely to experience. I explain why turbulence, although it feels unnatural, is perfectly safe. By reframing these events I help them see, hear and feel that all the externals are safe and a natural part of flying.

Neurotapping

At Nordic Coach & NLP Academy we have developed a hybrid combining NLP, tapping on meridian points and timeline. We have studied the tapping techniques of Roger Callahan's Thought Field Therapy (TFT), Gary Craig's Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT), and Dr Daniel Benor's Transformative Wholistic Reintegration (TWR).

By combining one or several of these with NLP, I can tailor the challenge at hand and achieve a greater effect than by using just one technique. Once the client has learned the Neurotapping technique, it can be practised very discreetly even in the most confined spaces; and is extremely effective.

My mentor Gillian's motto for more than 30 years of working within the field has been: 'Help for self-help is the best help of all.' My focus is to ensure that my clients have practical, effective coping tools to ensure they can anchor a desired state. In so doing they are able to re-access and maintain an empowered state before, during and after a flight. This changes their attitude to flying, and allows them a new and welcome experience.

What's also fascinating is the change I calibrate to at the end of the session / course. More than a few experience unease as I start to address the different aspects of flying. The level of fear decreases significantly and clients that subsequently complete a flight report that they are thrilled by the feeling of a new level of mastery. They feel safe and confident, and can hardly comprehend how they spent the last 5, 10 or 20+ years dreading what is now a new, and for some actually an enjoyable experience.

'Only an experienced pilot who is also a trained coach can provide such unique knowledge and reassuring help,' said Hilde Beate Berg, editor and journalist, and a course participant. ●



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6 tips for a more comfortable flight

- 1 Wear comfortable clothing.
- 2 Prior to the flight learn how to take control of your breathing.
- 3 Practice the 'I am' technique. As you take a deep breath tell yourself 'I am...' and then exhale and anchor a word of the positive state you wish to experience, such as 'calm' or 'peaceful'.
- 4 Visualise yourself in total control of your state arriving safely at the destination. You have had an enjoyable experience, are feeling safe and proud that you've taken and mastered the challenge.
- 5 Remind yourself that turbulence is like water. Imagine you're at sea and can feel the waves. Don't fight the movement, just go along with it. Remember turbulence may feel uncomfortable, but it's not dangerous.
- 6 If you at any time start to feel uneasy, break state by moving your body and bring your focus back to your breathing.

