

I would overhear someone talking about a phobia and I'd feel anxious and guilty, knowing I could help them and feeling I should make the offer but not quite having the nerve to do it.

# The Banana Phobia



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**S**ome businesses and people have incredible, true, heart-warming, tear-jerking, inspirational origin stories. The FedEx Wedding Dress story is one of them (<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/fedex-story-empowered-service-excellence-ajay-gomes/>), and Chris Gardner (The Pursuit of Happyness) is another (<https://brightside.me/articles/the-story-of-chris-gardner-the-man-behind-the-pursuit-of-happyness-796740/>)

NLP has perhaps thousands of examples of narrative evidence where an NLP-led transformation is life-changing for the recipient. We see fewer of these in print or talked about than we might and when we do, we seem to be quite blasé about them: "Another positive change performed... Next!"

So, here's an inspiring story from Jacqui Flavell. FedEx had the wedding dress – and we have...the banana!

I remember the very first NLP event I ever went to. There was a whole team of coaches ready to support us. The host introduced each person in turn, along with their level of certification: James, master practitioner of NLP, master practitioner of Timeline Therapy, master practitioner of hypnosis; and Tina, master practitioner of NLP, master practitioner of Timeline Therapy, master practitioner of hypnosis...

I remember thinking, "Wow! These people are impressive. I can't imagine how amazing it must be to be qualified in all that."

One year on, I was standing at the front being introduced as a master practitioner of all those things, thinking: "Oh my God! What if someone out there is thinking I'm amazing when clearly I'm not? I'm still just me, with a bunch of certificates."

Bring on a big old case of imposter syndrome.

It seemed to all be too much pressure. As a coach, I was very clear that my role was to help facilitate change in my clients. I wasn't the one with the answers; I just had to ask the questions that helped them find their own solutions. As an NLP coach, the suggestion was that people would come to me with problems and an expectation that I would 'fix' them – and in just one quick session.

What if it didn't work? I wasn't sure I believed it myself, so how would I convince someone else? I started to play with techniques

with people who felt safe, dealing with friends and colleagues who had phobias with great success. In fact, to date I have a 100% success rate for helping with phobias.

And yet my confidence would fade if I didn't do it for a while.

I would overhear someone talking about a phobia and I'd feel anxious and guilty, knowing I could help them and feeling I should make the offer but not quite having the nerve to do it.

I used my NLP language skills all the time in my coaching and training workshops but shied away from using overt change patterns. To me, this felt safer. I even wrote a book with my best friend and fellow NLP coach about choosing your own life story. Did this make me an expert? Hmm maybe, maybe not yet!

I knew NLP worked but still did not put myself in the same category as the 'rock stars' of the NLP world that I saw at NLP conferences.

## "I can do that!"

Then something unexpected happened. I was at the NLP International Conference in 2023 as a steward. I had watched the fabulous Dr Phil Parker show how he transforms the lives of people living with severe pain. He was awesome. At the same time, I realised many of the techniques he was talking about were things I already knew. It felt good. I thought, "Yes, this is impressive, and he explains it brilliantly – and I know much of this already."

The next day, I was sitting at the back of the room, manning the roving mic as a conference steward and overhearing a conversation going on between a fellow steward and the person assisting with the AV set-up. The AV person was talking about her phobia of bananas. She said it was having a real impact on her life because she was a teacher and couldn't do playground duty in case a child wanted a banana peeled. My colleague said there were a few master trainers in the room and he would set her up with someone to help her if she wanted. I thought, "It doesn't take a master trainer to delete a phobia. I can do that!"

I still have no idea where it came from inside me to say, "Do you want to work on it right now?" But she agreed and we popped out into the corridor. I ran a quick timeline process with her. Knowing she had been in the room when Phil Parker talked about going on

a magic carpet, I utilised that metaphor. Ten minutes later, she was looking for a banana to test it out.

This is always my favourite part – when the person thinks it hasn't worked and goes from doing everything to avoid the trigger to actively seeking one out...

Eventually she found one and spent the rest of the day carrying it around like a pet. She kept putting it against her face, as if this was the ultimate proof.

Chatting to her after, I said I was surprised she had got as far as coming to the NLP conference without having had an opportunity to work on her phobia. She explained that she was nothing to do with NLP. She'd never heard of it before; she was there as part of the AV engineer's support team!

As all good imposters do, I still managed to put myself down and tell myself that she'd had a whole day of being wonderfully convinced of the efficacy of NLP by watching Phil's presentation. It couldn't simply be that I knew what I was doing.

What was unexpected was the rest of the team's reaction to it. Everyone seemed to be very impressed. I kept thinking, "How impressive is something that simple among a body of people who, surely, could all have done what I did?"

So, I became massively impressed myself! It wasn't so much that I was amazed it had worked – after all, I'm still at 100% success. What impressed me most was that, surrounded by some rock stars of NLP, I decided to make the offer.

A few weeks later, I was on a training course and one of my fellow delegates mentioned a phobia of heights, lifts and escalators. I said, "Do you want to work on that?"

Ten minutes later, we were in the lift heading to the top floor...

So, if you're living under the shadow of imposter syndrome,

remember to embrace your own inner rock star. The results can be amazing! ■



**Embrace your own inner rock star. The results can be amazing!**

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