

## **Case Study**

### **Caroline Quaife March 2019**

Louis chose coaching to help with his low resilience, having lost his confidence after a significant bereavement and challenges in his professional life. In the past two years he felt he was letting himself down by not speaking up in meetings with senior leaders and politicians. His peers and others saw him differently, as someone with a wealth of knowledge and a passion for his work and a renowned specialist in his subject, he felt increasingly that he was 'a fraud'.

Building on his professional interest in exploring ideas we used the Immunity to Change map and identified two core assumptions which underpinned his responses and experience. One assumption was 'I stay safe by avoiding criticism and not speaking out, as when I am quizzed, I am being attacked'. This was of fundamental importance to his sense of self, having lost the person who had previously spoken up for what he believed in and flagged up potential risks and issues with integrity. The second assumption was that, as a senior leader and expert in his field, he should be able to prepare for every eventuality and be able to rely on his expert knowledge to answer any questions.

Louis spent a few weeks observing his first assumption, how he 'stayed safe' in different meetings, he wanted to see if his assumptions were always valid in every situation. Directing his scientific curiosity towards himself he found that he was not so defensive and was able to more easily offer his opinion where he felt the others in the meetings shared his values. He was at his most 'defensive and risk adverse' where he felt he did not share the same values as the people asking him questions. Stepping back and reflecting he moved from feeling his values had to be protected and that they were 'who he was' to seeing his values as an important and conscious choice which he could explore.

The concept of linking his 'bigger self' which he experienced with people who were challenging yet supportive and his 'smaller self' experienced with people who had different values was useful to Louis. He used his bigger self to offer different approaches to take into conflictual meetings and to be more ok with not having all the answers or disagreeing with those in authority.

With his second core assumption, always having the expert knowledge to answer any questions, Louis found an 'equals', (connecting two different things in a way which is obvious to you but not to others). His equals was 'being a professional means I should be able to know all the answers to any question in my field'. He has spent the last twenty years researching and understanding issues, becoming a well-respected expert in his field. However, in an environment of increasing complexity, this 'equals' was not serving him well as there were not always ready answers to be had. Articulating this he was able to see that professionals do not always have the answers and that his value came in helping others to explore a series of unknowns and possible and not always ideal solutions. Where he had seen clues that he was not valued if he did not have a ready answer, he was able to see other possibilities, including being valued for offering a more nuanced answer. He reframed his role from being an expert who knows the answers to someone with expert knowledge who can engage others in exploring possibilities and risks in complex situations with accountability sitting with everyone for the decisions made.

Through his openness with others about his assumptions and his reframing of his views, he found that others became more able to come to him with ideas they wanted to explore. His new habit of noticing his assumptions moving from 'subject' to his beliefs to holding them as 'object', meant he responded more openly in all contexts and the previously conflictual meetings became less fraught. He was able to build on that and find more choices for himself. He moved from a more socialised place seeing the values of more senior leaders and politicians as more important than his views to a more self-authored place with his values being just as important as others.