

An anxious runner – by Penny Pilbeam

Be aware	Reassign	Advocacy	Values	Engage plan
You can't do this. You're too slow. Why bother? Your time will be embarrassing – might as well find an excuse. Everyone else at your club is fast. You have a good excuse to walk.	Lazy Larry (Homer Simpson lookalike)	I ran a marathon only 3 weeks ago. I ran a great half in Paris. I ran strong in my final 'session' last Friday. I have handled back pain my whole life. I chose to do this BECAUSE it was hard.	Family Bravery I want to show daughter that you need to be brave if you want to hit your goals.	Pinch hand. Use my mantra (Make her Proud). Distraction (maths & aid station reviews). Imagine the medal. Chunking down the course.

So, like a lot of mornings, I was coming back from dropping my youngest to school and I bumped into Mark H. We always have a chat, we live near each other, on the Brookmead mile rep loop! My son Oscar was delighted years ago when he met Mark and Dawn's lovely old Oscar dog, his namesake – maybe did name him after Oscar after all 😊

Like all of us, I love running, always have and I can't remember a time when I didn't put my trainers on and go for a run. Joining TAC some years ago now, I couldn't believe my luck, likeminded people who also ran past their houses to round up to the nearest K!

My children are also TAC and the value and family environment is just what I think they need in this growing age of anxiety, business and pressure. I think they are getting the picture that to do something physical makes you feel good! That's enough.

But, what has almost crippled me into not running is racing / event is anxiety. I once shared this with Mark, who has been an endless ear of listening and support along with Mark PK (thank you both). Over the years this has gotten worse, until one year I spent the night before a marathon sobbing and panicking in my garage! This is not healthy, which of course I knew. It didn't help that moving up a few age categories the big M started to catch up with me, heightening my anxiety. (that's a whole other story, haha)

So, not one to give up, give in, I ran those marathons and have no idea how I got to the start line.

This year, I was determined to run London, after breaking a bone in my foot last year training for it. With just over 4 months of marathon training, and not breaking I thought I could do it. Then 2 weeks before, the anxiety started creeping in, nervous

chatter, thoughts of being unable run a step, fast breathing, sweating. I knew I had to get on top of this, somehow.

For me, always keen to read and learn more, I discovered Dr Josie Perry on Twitter. Oh my, was this someone who had a refreshing perspective on marathon anxiety ! She is worth a follow and a read and has written much on the subject, and a lot more. There was one technique that truly resonated – BRAVE – I literally thought I can do this ! So, I have put the chart in this email, I invested time in developing a coping strategy for me, before and during the marathon.

I found my own words - I was running for my friend's son, who has muscular dystrophy, that was reason enough, but it never still cut it for keeping that voice at bay. During the marathon I can honestly say that I used this technique - Being aware of my thoughts, Reassigning my Lazy Larry, Self-Advocating, all that training !!! Engaged in a plan to finish, prove I could do it, help raise for Connor, he needs so much research and funding, and overall making my family proud.

I counted to 100, just to move my brain over – a Paula Radcliffe technique! I love Vassos Alexander, a bit marmite I know, so I read his latest book. I'll read anything about running ! (he was recently in an ultra my brother-in-law was running and I endlessly asked for photos, never mind worrying about his 100 mile run !) – Anyway I read his book - “How to run a marathon” days before the race – and thought of the many, quotes and techniques he uses – break it into 8 and a bit 5k's, a mile for each person in your family, just little doable things like that. He has quotes from psychologists, elites, phenomenons and much more.

I was sharing this with Mark today as we caught up, the 2 dogs now laying on the pavement, as I wittered on, and he asked me to write a piece. I don't know if this will help anyone or whether it sounds plain daft and possibly a little bit embarrassing that I have opened up about this. My teenage daughter of course thinks all this is embarrassing and ridiculous, but equally when she is stressed or anxious, we go for a walk, a run, the gym. She is infinitely nicer afterwards and can get a good perspective on the things that were troubling her. So, I hope that by sharing this, that whatever your ability, age or state of mind, something in this is useful.

Penny Pilbeam – April 2023

After running 3.33.16 in the London Marathon in W50 category (pb is 3.28.36 as W45 in 2019)