The use of a simulator for the treatment of the fear of flying

*Taming the airplane*

a program by Captain Noël Chevrier and Marie-Claude Dentan

(Air France, 1993)
The use of a flight simulator for the treatment of the fear of flying

• Diagnosis: the different groups of stressed passengers

• Training programme: half-day course

• Results
The diagnostic procedures

• A questionnaire aimed at examining the reasons and measuring the level of the fear of flying.

• Then, a deep interview with a psychologist.

• We distinguish several « families » of stressed passengers.
Families of stressed passengers

The Earthlings

- Do not understand how a huge air craft can leave the ground.
- A machine heavier than air simply cannot fly.
- There is something magical and somewhat dangerous about flying.

No psychological problem with them. They need knowledge.
The *Decision-makers and Overworked managers*

- They do not like delegating responsibilities. In the plane, they suffer anxiety about their loss of control over events.
- And also ...too much stress.
  - They must learn how to better manage their stress as a whole
Families of stressed passengers: The ones who suffer from airplane phobia

- They need cognitive restructuring and gradual exposure.
- Simulator is very useful for this step-by-step exposure.
Families of stressed passengers:
The ones who went through a shock related to flying

It is P.T.S.D. consequence.
The memory of a past stimulus distorts the perception of the actual flight.
They need « to cut » the association plane equals danger.
Families of stressed passengers: Those who suffer intense anxiety

- However this programme is not efficient for those who suffer intense anxiety with all its adverse effects in the different aspects of their life.
Families of stressed passengers: Agoraphobic

- Agoraphobic is a different problem
- They will need to follow a therapy.
- We refer them to specialists.
How to tame the aeroplane
a half-day course

• Session on how to manage in-flight stress
• Introduction to aeronautics with the pilots
• Simulator session
1 How to manage in-flight stress

• What stress is?
• What anxiety is?
• Everybody has a breakpoint.
  *You must know your stress limits.*
• Coping stills and learning how to relax.
2 Aeronautics

• Pilots describe the laws of aeronautics, airline navigation, turbulences and everything about flying, from take-off to landing.
Factors that trigger more stress

• Mechanical features
• Take off
• Turbulence
• Bad weather conditions

Why do its wings move?
3 Simulator session

• The trainees will fly over oceans with storms and experience mechanical failures.
• The pilots can copy every possible situation.
• The trainees can re-experience the stages of the flight that give them more anxiety.
A warm welcome for a stress-free flight

• If they inform the anti-stress in advance, the crew is advised
• They will receive special attention on their next Air France flight.
A practical guide

How to overcome the fear of flying

• Read a practical guide

→ No more mystery.
Taming the plane

What about the Results?

• In 50% of cases, fear of flying disappears completely….
Taming the plane

...What about the Results?

• 35% are not completely over their fears, but feel more able to manage their remaining stress.

• For 10%, course was too short. They need complementary help (an other training or brief therapy).

• 5% no news.
Conclusion

• The flight in a Simulator is very useful. It shows a significant clinical interest.
• It allows a natural and progressive immersion.
• But to ensure a successful session, what is most important: approach the course with positive attitude.

I know now, we are in good hands.