

The “Formidable” Taylor Challenge: Karl Vasey

Richard looked up at the formidable Blue spruce tree rising above him. *Just shimmy up to the first bough and walk up the log set at a 45-degree angle to join the next tree, they'd said.*

“Don't worry Richard, you'll be attached to a wire at all times!” said a work colleague. “When the students come tomorrow, the first question they will ask you is, did you take the challenge?” said another. Richard said, “I just can't!” People around gave knowing looks, a couple smirked which rankled Richard into action. *I will do this!*

Richard could feel a pounding sensation, not in his chest but rather at the throat level. He estimated his pulse rate at 160bpm. After several attempts scaling the log, a voice from ground zero said, “You have to run up it!” Following the advice Richard galvanised all his resources and took a leap of faith and found himself hugging a branch at the second bough!

“That's great Richard, now reach up and disconnect your carabiner and reconnect to the next wire.” With hands wobbling, Richard reached up, unhooked, and reattached as directed. Ahead of him was daunting. A wired ‘walkway’ arced across a small valley to the next large spruce. The wire was supported by two other wires in a V shape as if providing handrails. Richard stood up, checked he was still attached to the overhead wire. This wire provided no support and hung loosely, to be engaged only in an emergency! Edging along the wire bridge, Richard tentatively moved in a crab like fashion, holding the ‘support’ wires in each hand. Encouraging voices could be heard from below and only just penetrating the fog of Richard's panic.

On reaching the next tree, Richard, now more confident, detached his carabiner and moved his focus to the last epic test. The zip lines! It was a monster, dipping down at a precarious angle to a destination that was obscured by the early morning mist. Richard reached up to grip onto the trapeze-like bar attached to a complex mechanism of wheels and wires. The rush was fantastic, not only the movement but the realisation that Richard had conquered the challenge and was alive to tell the tale.

In the days that followed, Richard on reflection, re-enacted the emotional experience of overcoming such a cathartic challenge. Sometimes in life, experiences once thought formidable become just doable!