

STUTTERING, ADVERTISING and TELEMARETERS

Stephen B. Hood, Ph.D.

I am one of the SLP's who believes strongly in the benefits of being open, honest and accepting of stuttering. Although attempts to hide, deny, conceal and avoid stuttering may at times give you some temporary short-term relief, they are doomed to failure over the long haul. Both behaviorally and emotionally it is far more beneficial to show your acceptance of stuttering and one of the ways to do this is through "Advertising." Ways to advertise stuttering are through such things as wearing a FRIENDS T-shirt, talking openly about stuttering and doing some voluntary stuttering.

In the old days, I would have recommended that you make toll free phone calls to 1-800 phone numbers to do some voluntary stuttering while inquiring about products that might be for sale. You didn't need to buy anything, but you needed to find out specific things about the product(s) that were for sale. For example, as a sixteen year old, you might call Geico Insurance to find out the details on auto insurance for teen drivers. Or you might call someone locally to inquire about the used car that you saw listed for sale in the morning newspaper.

Now-a-days, I might reverse the process. You can use voluntary stuttering in response to calls you receive, rather than those you place. Talk with your family about this and enlist their help. I think you can devise some family projects that will let you all work together in ways that can be both helpful and fun. It is also good to get the family involved so that if someone else answers the phone, they can immediately give the phone to you, and let you handle the call yourself.

If your family is anything like mine, I'll bet you are all bombarded by unsolicited and unwanted phone calls from telemarketers. Computer-generated lists of phone numbers allow these pesterers to call your home land line or cell phone. Until recently my initial reaction was to silently cuss the person out and then abruptly hang up.

But now, I have a second option. After listening to the prerecorded canned sales pitch, I click the prompt that allows me to actually talk to this telemarketer, and do some voluntary stuttering all the way through the conversation. (It is sometimes hard to keep from laughing.) Here are a couple of quick examples of recent calls I have received.

- One telemarketer wanted to offer a low interest credit card. After listening to his sales pitch, he asked if I had any questions. I asked how much annual income I needed, and asked how much I could charge per month. I did enough voluntary stuttering so keep him on the line for longer than he appreciated, and then I told him that I was fourteen years old, and would need to ask my parents if this would be ok. I told him my allowance would not be enough to have the necessary annual salary, but assured him that my parents would stick up for me. I could tell that he was caught totally off guard not only by my voluntary stuttering, but that fact that I was apparently an "unemployed middle schooler." Finally, I told him: "Th-th-th-thank you

vvvvery much, but I think yyyou should t-t-t-take me off your calling llllist.”
Then I hang up.

- During the last election a lady who represented one of the local candidates for the county school board called our house. After giving me her canned speech she asked if I had any questions. I did some voluntary stuttering as I asked about her candidate’s position on Magnet Schools, random drug testing for kids in middle school, and how proposed changes in the bussing routs would affect kids in my part of town. After she concluded her answers, she said, “Thank you for talking with me. I hope we can count on your vote.” I answered by saying “Thanks ffffffor the in-in-infffformation, but I’m still a stu-stu-d-d-dent and am nnnnot old enough t-t-t-to vvvvvvote.”
- And finally, there was a call I took from one of the cablevision companies. They wanted us to buy their special deluxe package that included high speed internet, land-line telephone, and the deluxe package of channels that could be accesses. During the course of the conversation I told them that I was and raised in the Boston area, and wondered if they had stations that covered the PPPPatriors, Cel-Cel-Celtics, Brrrrruins and Re-Re-Re-Red Sox. When the caller told me he was not sure, I thanked him and said “g-g-good bbbye.

I think you can have some fun using voluntary stuttering with telemarketers. It is a great way to advertise your stuttering, and letting your family participate in what you are doing. If they hear you, they will know what you are doing and why you are doing it. And by the way, don’t let yourself feel sorry for wasting the telemarketers’ time: after all, you didn’t call them. They were the ones that called you in the first place.

I hope you find these ideas to be helpful to you in your courageous endeavors to confront and deal with your stuttering.

Best wishes and Good Luck.

----- END -----