



**STRATEGIES FOR
DISABLING THE
STUTTERING HEXAGON**

*Edited by
John C. Harrison*

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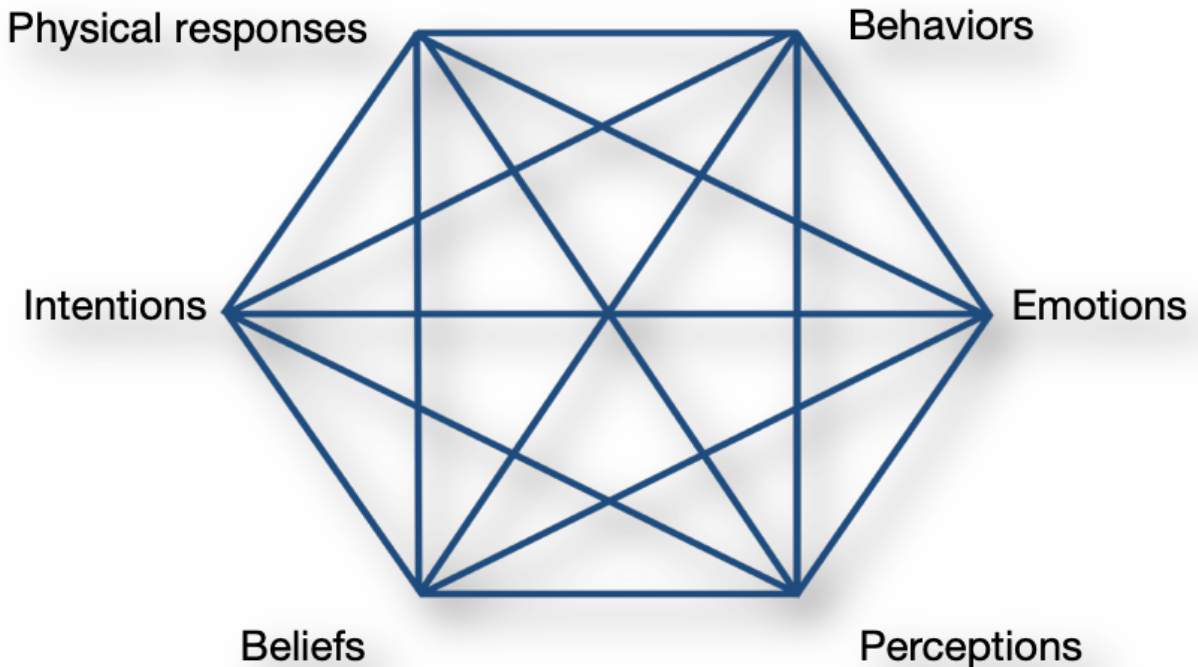
Edited by

John C. Harrison

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INTRODUCTION

By John C. Harrison



The Stuttering Hexagon

All points affect, and are affected by, all the other points.

Chronic stuttering and blocking are best conceptualized as a holistic, self-reinforcing system in the shape of a hexagon. The concept was first introduced in 1985 and was extensively explored in the 600-page book *Redefining Stuttering: What the Struggle to Speak Is Really All About*.

The book you're now beginning continues the exploration of the Stuttering Hexagon. It is a repository of articles written by a variety of people in the stuttering world. And it responds to the continuing need for new articles on the holistic way of understanding stuttering.

My interest in stuttering was stimulated by my own speech difficulties. I grew up with a moderate blocking problem, and my recovery began when I relocated from New York to San Francisco in 1961 and became involved with the self-discovery and personal growth activities prevalent in California.

It was during this time that I met Michael Sugarman and Bob Goldman, two guys who had been wrestling with their own stuttering issues. Michael and Bob came up with the idea of starting a local self-help organization for people who stuttered. They called it the National Stuttering Project. And it wasn't long before our small group was meeting once a week in San Francisco.

Initially, we just sat around and talked about our experiences with stuttering. But just doing that got old pretty fast. So, it wasn't long before we had developed a meeting format that consisted of sharing our own thoughts and experiences in the first half and practicing short talks in the second.

Then inside of a year, we saw the need for a workshop on public speaking. I put one together, and we held it across the bay in Berkeley. It was my first experience facilitating a group, and by all accounts it came off successfully.

Over the next several years the idea of self-help NSP chapters for people who stuttered (PWS) began taking hold in other parts of the United States. The next NSP chapter was in the Los Angeles area with a group started by Annie Bradberry (who eventually became executive director after John Ahlbach left to found his own organization for children who stuttered.) And soon after, other groups had started up in Dallas and Houston, and we were hearing about such emerging stars as Russ Hicks and Vicki Benson.

Fast forward to 1985 when the NSP (now called the National Stuttering Association) put on its first national conference. I say "national conference" in quotes because our get-together consisted of about 18 people, seventeen who came from San Francisco and one who came from Seattle. We knew we wanted to hold a workshop at the conference, and what better idea than a workshop on public speaking complete with manual. So I sat down one weekend to see if I could think of 10 characteristics of public speaking that were essential to giving a good presentation. In my mind's eye I pictured all the good speakers I had heard over the previous few months at Toastmasters and thought hard about what worked for them.

In due course, I had what I considered was a really compelling list. I then developed each of the "good-speaker" characteristics into an exercise. The 48-page manual was printed on a dot matrix printer (remember that early technology?) and distributed at the workshop. It also appears as Chapter Eight in *Redefining Stuttering*.

Expanding the book

Originally, the public speaking manual was entitled *How to Conquer Your Fears of Speaking Before People*, but at some point we started adding articles on stuttering written by people in the stuttering community. And very soon these other articles were defining a more holistic way to look at stuttering.

This called for a new title, *Redefining Stuttering: What the Struggle to Speak is Really All About*, which was provided by NSA member Paul Engelman. Over the following 25 years the book grew to its present size.

The 649 page book (which also contains the original Stuttering Hexagon article) is available as a FREE download. The Internet address is:
<http://www.freestutteringbooks.com/uploads/3/2/1/1/32111425/redefining-stuttering-2011.pdf>

Table of Contents

Stuttering Is Not What You Think It Is <i>John C. Harrison</i>	1
Why the Nightmare Ended <i>Alex Bernard</i>	2
I'm no Longer Powerless <i>Kelly Conroy Smith</i>	15
Chronic Stuttering: A Conflict of Control Systems <i>John C. Harrison</i>	17
Equating Treatment of Stuttering with Success <i>Barbara Dahm CCC-SLP; BCS-F</i>	21
I Had to Learn to Stutter with Confidence <i>Mike Wilson</i>	24
Working from the Inside Out: a "Soul-Directed Approach to Stuttering Therapy" <i>Marjorie Foer M.A., CCC-SLP; BCS-F</i>	28
Whacking the Phone Book <i>John C. Harrison</i>	33
The Problem with Stuttering Therapy <i>Barbara Dahm CCC-SLP; BCS-F</i>	37
A Trip on LSD and What I Learned about Chronic Stuttering <i>John C. Harrison</i>	40
Stuttering Became My Biggest Blessing <i>Lee Lovett</i>	47
My Recovery <i>Prathusha Ravi, India</i>	50
Understanding a Speech Block <i>John C. Harrison</i>	52
The Story of Recovery <i>Ruth Mead, author of Speech Is A River</i>	57
The Stuttering Simply Dies <i>Kenny Macheka</i>	82
The Elusive Within Reach <i>Inge van der Reijden</i>	87
How Chronic Stuttering Evolves <i>John C. Harrison</i>	96

Stuttering Is Not What You Think It is

by John C. Harrison

The REAL problem we deal with is not the dysfluency per se. Rather, it's the emotional HOLDING BACK that causes the speech block.

And what is it that the person is holding back?

It's always the same thing: the person is holding back emotions like fear, anger, panic, confusion, etc. -- all things that the PWS will do anything in the world NOT to experience and reveal.

What happens is that over time, the defensive holding back (ie: the speech blocks) become automatic. A reflex. And that is what the PWS ends up fearing. It becomes the major focus because the speech block, which the PWS initiates unconsciously, is the only thing he/she ever sees, and it seems to be outside of his or her direct control. It also has social consequences.

But it is NOT the bottom line. It's only what the person remains conscious and aware off.

In truth, the *actual* cause of his/her speech blocks is the compulsion to HOLD BACK. And what the holding back is all about is the fear of what the person may have to experience (and reveal to others as well as to himself) if he/she lets go.

So, what can you do? Just keep asking yourself what you might have to experience if you did not hold back? How might people react to you if they could see the REAL you? How vulnerable would that make you feel? Who might you end up becoming? Aside from the helplessness that you feel when you can't get the words out...

What are you *REALLY* afraid of?

Why the Nightmare Ended

by Alex Bernard

The Nightmare

It was my third year of university, and I was just minutes from the start of a campus recruiting event for accounting students seeking summer internships. I felt light-headed, confused, and as if I were about to faint. I was unsure whether this was from the extreme anxiety I was feeling or the large doses of pharmaceutical tranquilizers I was taking as a desperate attempt at masking the chronic stuttering problem I had lived with for most of my life.

My anxiety about this event had been building for months. I felt that if I stuttered severely, it would make me seem like a mentally challenged freak, guaranteeing that I would be rejected. I felt that my entire career was on the line because I falsely believed that if I was unable to get an accounting internship, it would mean I'm incapable of having a successful career.

Finally, I walked through the door of the room the event was taking place in. I was so anxious I felt that reality itself was losing its meaning. I decided to immediately walk right up to the first recruiter I saw before having time to second guess myself. He shook my hand and introduced himself. I attempted to say "My name is Alex." But I felt that the task was impossible. I began convulsing wildly as I tried to force the first word out.

After realizing that I would never be able to say even one word no matter how long I struggled, I pulled out the pen and notepad I brought with me as a backup plan and wrote my name on it while showing it to the recruiter. This was a technique suggested to me by Lee Lovett, a person who recovered from stuttering, who had been coaching me several months earlier. Interestingly, I found I was suddenly able to say the sentence without a hitch.

After this, I put the pen and notepad down, looked the recruiter in the eye, and tried to say the next sentence I had planned. The task was once again impossible. For the rest of the event, I wrote down every single word I said while I was saying it because as soon as I tried to say something without writing it at the same time, I would suddenly lose the ability to speak.

After this experience, I felt truly defeated. I thought there was no way anyone would want to hire the complete freak I felt I came across as. I had no hope of having a successful career in accounting because oral communication skills are critical. I also felt I had no chance of having any sort of normal social life communicating like this and was destined for a life on the fringes of society. Life seemed so horrible it didn't even feel real. I felt I was living in a nightmare. Somebody else's nightmare.

In the past, however, there were times where I was a normal, relaxed, fluent, sociable person. I hoped that one day I'd figure out how to get into that state again and make it my normal way of being.

I decided to stop taking the pharmaceutical tranquilizer I was relying on for fluency. It obviously had no effect on my speech and was causing a neurological side effect called akathisia that

resulted in an indescribable but agonizing feeling that was only relieved by constantly moving my arms and legs.

That night, I didn't sleep a wink. Or the next night. Or the night after. Eventually, I was unable to focus on anything and began to feel as if my mind was working in slow motion. I began to wonder whether these effects were withdrawal side effects from the drug I was taking, so I began researching it obsessively.

What I read truly terrified me. I read stories from others who experienced severe insomnia and brain fog for a year or more after they stopped taking the drug. I also read about research that suggested the drug causes permanent brain damage. I was so anxious I literally didn't sleep more than two hours per night for three months straight.

While this was going on, I applied for accounting internships at ten different organizations. I was interviewed by seven of them, and all my interviews went about as well as the recruiting event I described above.

Waking up From the Nightmare

Even though I was almost sure I wouldn't receive a job offer, I managed to land a summer internship with an international agribusiness. After this, something interesting happened. My stutter seemed to have become less severe than before. My anxiety lifted, and I began sleeping through the night again. I also began chatting with other accounting students during my classes, something I'd rarely done previously. I felt I had a lot in common with them and conversation seemed to flow effortlessly, which wasn't usually the case with my friends from high school. I then began hanging out with them outside of class.

While this was going on, my speech blocks continued to become shorter and less frequent. It felt like the root of the problem was disappearing. Eventually, I completely stopped thinking about my stutter. It didn't cross my mind again until my friends from high school began to comment that it seemed to have pretty much disappeared. I felt certain that a relapse was inevitable, yet the fluency remained.

At the time this article was written, it's been over a year since I received the job offer. I haven't had a single speech block in months. I also don't use any sort of techniques, avoid any words, or preplan any sentences. I simply speak the same way people who never stuttered do. I still have the normal disfluencies most people have, and they occur more frequently in my speech than most people's. However, I'm aware of the reason for the hesitations and don't feel that there is anything beyond my control preventing me from speaking. I feel like I have complete freedom of speech. My speech can now come out as fast as my mind can come up with the words I want to say.

This is completely different from the speech blocks I experienced before. I no longer experience the terrifying and frustrating feeling of being unable to get a word out no matter how hard I try. The relief I feel is indescribable. I now feel confident that my future will be bright. I truly feel like I woke up from a nightmare.

Background Info

Let me back up and provide some context. My parents remember first noticing my stutter just before I turned three, but I don't remember being aware of or concerned about it until around age nine. I then began to feel frustrated and embarrassed by it. I also started developing the belief that nearly all my problems in life, especially my lack of social success, stemmed from my stutter. One part of me truly believed that if I could eliminate the stutter, my life would be nearly perfect.

These feelings gradually led to the development of an all-consuming obsession with trying to eliminate all traces of stuttering from my speech. From age ten until twenty, it was the primary focus of my life. It was on my mind virtually all the time. I worked with almost a dozen speech therapists and coaches from all over the world who specialized in stuttering, convinced my parents to buy a delayed auditory feedback device for me, and spent, at times, over ten hours per day researching and thinking about the problem.

While most of these approaches appeared to reduce my stutter at first, the results never lasted more than a few weeks.

My stutter gradually became more and more severe. It eventually got to the point where I was effectively mute in nearly all speaking situations. Although the problem did wax and wane to some degree, and even completely disappeared at times, it always returned with a vengeance. My social life was pretty much non-existent most of the time, and my only hope for a successful future appeared to be eliminating the stutter. So I continued chasing fluency.

My Search for the Cause of Stuttering

Most mainstream medical experts consider chronic stuttering to be a neurobiological condition that stems from genetically induced brain abnormalities. A widely accepted theory was put forth by Per Alm in his Ph.D. thesis *On the Causal Mechanisms of Stuttering*. He argued that stuttering is caused by an excess of D2 receptors in the basal ganglia, the region of the brain experts believe provides the timing signals for speech. To me, this theory seemed overly complex and didn't jive with my own observations, so I decided to figure out for myself exactly what was causing or triggering my stutter.

One clue I've been aware of for a while is that it didn't just appear and disappear randomly. It was obvious there were patterns to it. The following factors appeared to trigger my stutter:

- Attempting to gain someone's approval. This included trying to make new friends, making a move on girls I was attracted to, or talking to recruiters and job interviewers. I stuttered less around people I felt I was already accepted by, such as my family.
- Talking to people I felt were "above me."
- Speaking in unfamiliar social situations or attempting to talk about topics I had little knowledge on.

- Saying things I felt may come across the wrong way, things I feared were socially inappropriate to say, or things I feared may make me appear weird to the person I was talking to.
- Attempting to start conversations with others, especially strangers. I stuttered less when others started conversations with me.
- Complex exchanges, such as explaining an idea or opinion I had. I stuttered less when the exchange was simple, such as when answering a yes or no question or giving a piece of factual information.
- I stuttered most on important words that carried a lot of meaning and rarely struggled with unimportant filler words.

Factors that reduced/eliminated my stutter were:

- Talking in silly voices
- Singing
- Reciting from memory
- Reading aloud

There were also times in my life when my stutter completely disappeared for weeks at a time. After thinking about what was going on in my life during periods of fluency, I realized that my life circumstances led me to feel confident in myself and socially accepted. Somehow, this feeling seemed to reduce my stutter.

A theory put forth by Dr. Martin F. Schwartz in his book *You Can Stop Stuttering* is that stress causes tension in the vocal folds, and this tension prevents them from vibrating, making it impossible to speak. This theory intuitively made sense to me. Many of the situations that triggered my stutter were stressful situations.

To test if this theory was correct, I decided that the next time I encountered a speech block I would continue moving my mouth and move onto the next sound or word even if my vocal folds were unable to vibrate. This is equivalent to whispering.

Interestingly, what happened when I tried this is I simply spoke normally. I believed I'd finally discovered a technique that could reliably prevent me from stuttering. I went almost a month without encountering a single speech block. I believed I was finally cured!

As usual, it didn't last. Eventually, while trying to ask a friend a question that I feared may be too personal, I found myself unable to get the first word out. I tried forcing my mouth to move even if my vocal folds were too tense to vibrate, but it felt like my mouth was frozen.

After this incident, I lost all faith in my new technique and went back to believing there was nothing I could do to prevent myself from stuttering. I also went right back to being effectively mute in nearly all speaking situations. This experiment allowed me to rule out the theory that stress-induced vocal tension triggered my stutter, *and it reinforced my belief that the problem stemmed from cognitive factors.*

Another experiment I did, suggested to me by Barbara Dahm, a speech therapist who created her own holistic stuttering treatment program, was making random speech sounds that didn't carry any meaning. I realized I could do this without any difficulty. This confirmed that my stutter had nothing to do with difficulty pronouncing certain sounds. Rather, *it seemed to be the meaning certain words carried* that triggered the problem.

Connecting the Dots

It was beyond obvious to me right after my recovery that my stutter was caused or triggered by cognitive factors and life circumstances rather than neurobiological abnormalities. However, I was unsure exactly what those factors were and why they caused me to stutter.

I read John Harrison's book *Redefining Stuttering* and Ruth Mead's book *Speech is a River* over seven years ago. At the time, I intuitively felt there was a lot of truth to these books. But I was unable to fully understand how these two seemingly different theories were related and how they applied to my own situation.

About a month ago, I read through the books again in an attempt to make sense of my recovery. This time, it couldn't possibly have been any clearer to me exactly what the authors meant and how their writing applied to my situation. *The core cause of my stutter was that I was hesitating in my speech for reasons I was unaware of.* In other words, one part of me wanted to say something, but the other part was afraid to say it. Because I was unaware of the reasons I was hesitating, it felt like my speech was getting hung up for reasons beyond my control.

I felt that the problem must be physical, and I had to physically "break free" of the speech blocks or "force the words out". I used a variety of strategies to try to accomplish this such as contorting my face, swallowing repeatedly, making clicking noises, and saying filler words to build up momentum to carry me through the difficult words. Although I felt embarrassed by these unusual behaviors, I felt that fighting against the speech blocks was the only way to ever get words out. I've now realized I wasn't fighting against anything besides my own hesitations.

The reason I was hesitating was fairly simple. Essentially, *it was a combination of a fear of getting rejected for saying something socially inappropriate/awkward/dumb-sounding and an expectation that what I wanted to say would come across that way.* The greater the risk I felt there was that I would be REJECTED for saying something that sounded bad, or the greater the risk I felt there was that I WOULD say something that sounded bad, the more I hesitated in my speech.

The severity of my stutter was determined by the following formula: **Stuttering Severity = (fear that what I had to say would sound bad) + (fear that I would get rejected for saying something that sounded bad).**

Consider the situation where I stuttered while trying to ask my friend the question I feared may be too personal. I was simply hesitating to ask it because I wasn't sure if it was socially appropriate to ask. I was afraid that asking it might cause him to think less of me.

It explains why I stuttered when attempting to gain the approval of others. I was afraid of saying something that sounded dumb or awkward because I thought I would be rejected if I did. When talking to people I felt I was already accepted by, such as my family, I felt there was less risk of getting rejected if I accidentally said something that sounded bad, so I filtered my speech less.

It explains why I struggled the most when talking to people I felt were “above me.” I believed their social skills were much better than mine, and they were far more worldly than me, making it more likely they would reject me for saying something that sounded dumb or awkward. If I felt I was talking to someone who was “on my level,” I thought there was less risk of getting rejected if I said something that sounded bad.

It explains why I stuttered more severely when in unfamiliar social situations, or when attempting to talk about a subject I had little knowledge on. I felt less confident in these situations, so I felt there was a greater risk I would say something that sounded dumb or awkward.

It explains why I stuttered most when starting conversations with others, and less when others started conversations with me. If I was the one starting a conversation, there was a greater chance of messing up because I would be expected to lead the conversation. When others started the conversation, I was able to simply answer their questions – a much easier task.

It explains why I stuttered more during complex exchanges and less when answering simple questions or giving factual information. The more complex the exchange, the greater the risk of messing up.

It explains why talking in silly voices and singing reduced my stutter. I wasn’t being myself, so there was no risk that I, myself, would be rejected. I also wasn’t being serious; I was just goofing off. So, it felt like it didn’t matter if I said something awkward or dumb-sounding.

It explains why reading aloud or reciting from memory reduced my stutter. Either the words I was saying weren’t my own, so I didn’t feel like I was putting myself at risk of rejection by saying them, or I had already decided ahead of time that they sounded good and I was going to say them, so I felt confident enough in them to say them without hesitating.

Finally, it explains why it was usually the most important and meaningful words I struggled the most with. Consider a situation where a person who stutters is attempting to flirt with another person by saying “You look really cute.” Which word would likely cause the problem? If you’re a person who stutters, you may feel that the word “cute” would be the difficult one.

Why is this the case? It’s not because the “c” is inherently difficult for him to say or his basal ganglia randomly begins malfunctioning as soon as he attempts to say this particular word. It’s because once he says the word cute, the other person knows what he meant. His intentions are now clear. There’s no backing out and pretending he was going to say something else now. He’s directly putting himself at risk of rejection.

Interestingly, it wasn’t always the word I appeared to be hung up on that I was afraid of saying. For example, I often struggled to say my name to strangers. It wasn’t that I feared I would sound bad or be rejected for saying my name; it’s a fairly simple exchange that’s difficult to mess up. In this case, the problem was what was to come after. I was afraid that what I would say after the names were exchanged would sound bad and lead to rejection.

This was particularly the case when I was the one starting the conversation as I would be expected to carry the conversation after the names were exchanged. I felt afraid that I wouldn’t be able to carry the conversation in a reasonably socially acceptable manner, so I would hold myself back

from saying my name so that hopefully before I said it the other person would walk away from me, get distracted by something else, or begin carrying the conversation for me. This would allow me to avoid putting myself at risk of coming across as awkward while allowing myself and others to believe I was at least trying to be sociable.

It all boiled down to a fear of being assertive. When one acts passively, there is less risk of messing up, coming across as socially awkward, or saying something that sounds dumb. Assertiveness opens oneself up to the possibility of judgement and rejection. I didn't want to open myself up to this possibility because I didn't trust myself. Therefore, I felt the need to hold myself back whenever I attempted to be assertive.

While this explains why I stuttered in most situations, there were also times it happened even though there appeared to be no risk of saying something that sounded bad. For example, sometimes I stuttered while practicing speaking in a room by myself. It was usually less severe than when I was talking to other people, but it still sometimes happened. Why was I holding back here? I'll address this question in a bit.

First, why did I have such little confidence in myself that I constantly felt I was going to say something that sounded bad?

Why was I so afraid of being rejected?

Most importantly, why was I unaware that these factors were causing me to hesitate in my speech?

I believe the answers to these questions can be found by examining my life situation. As a young child, I was very afraid of getting into trouble with authority figures. I would hesitate when talking to them because I was afraid I might say something wrong that would get me into trouble. They called these hesitations a condition called stuttering.

Eventually, I began to forget why I was hesitating and started believing them that my hesitations were caused by a condition that was beyond my control.

I was also extremely introverted. From a young age, I preferred keeping to myself rather than interacting with other people. I was very concerned with doing well in school, and always had a complex inner world. I was a daydreamer. I felt that socializing with others was a distraction from these more important endeavors.

As I grew older, I became less introverted. I began wanting to make more friends and have an active social life, but due to my lack of social experience, I had severely underdeveloped social skills and lacked worldliness. I knew little about anything besides academics, theories on the cause of stuttering, and techniques to try to prevent it. I didn't know how to act or what to say in most social situations. This caused me to constantly feel afraid that what I was about to say would sound dumb or awkward.

Eventually, this became the primary reason I hesitated in my speech. It was no longer a fear of getting into trouble with authority figures. Rather, it was now a fear of getting rejected for being socially awkward and unworldly.

But why was I unaware this was the reason I was hesitating? Although I was aware of these issues on some level, *a part of me was afraid the problem was so severe I'd be unable to accept myself and others wouldn't accept me if the full extent of it was revealed.* Whenever I felt there was a risk of this happening, I would subconsciously hold myself back from speaking. It was a defense mechanism that prevented myself and others from becoming aware of my social awkwardness and lack of worldliness.

Why did I feel it was better to talk with a stutter than come across as socially awkward and unworldly? Because stuttering appeared to be something that was beyond my control, so I felt it was less likely to cause others to reject me. And if they did, I wouldn't have to blame myself for it. My stutter led people to believe I was more socially capable and worldly than I truly was, and that I knew how to handle social situations but simply couldn't get the words out. It allowed me to get more respect from others than I really deserved, and it allowed me to believe in a fantasy of being better than I really was.

This behavior was too ridiculous, irrational, cowardly, and complex for me to accept or realize consciously. That's why it felt to me like my speech blocks were something that happened to me rather than something I was creating.

Many normal speakers also hesitate at times because they are afraid that what they are about to say will sound bad. They sometimes encounter a social situation they don't feel confident in or have a thought they aren't sure how to put into words, so they hesitate briefly. But they feel confident enough in their overall social abilities and level of worldliness that they don't feel the need to deceive themselves and others into believing they're better than they really are. They don't feel the need to blame their hesitations on something beyond their control because they believe the situations they hesitate in are situations that would also cause other normal people their age to hesitate.

This wasn't the case for me. Because I rarely interacted with others, I struggled with very basic social situations that most people my age were already comfortable with, was far less worldly than most people my age, didn't know a lot of the slang most people my age use, and my ability to put my thoughts into words was far worse than most people my age. I was so embarrassed by this that I couldn't accept it. So whenever I began hesitating in situations I felt I shouldn't be hesitating in, it felt to me like the hesitations were involuntary. I blamed them on a speech disorder that was beyond my control. And because a part of me truly believed this was the case, I began fighting against my own hesitations with facial contortions, filler words to build momentum, swallowing, and making clicking noises.

From an objective standpoint, it seems silly that I went as far as pretending to have a disability in order to deceive myself and others into believing I was better than I really was. Surely, coming across as socially awkward or unworldly wouldn't have been so horrible that this elaborate routine was worthwhile. Everyone puts their foot in their mouth at times. However, I was such an extreme perfectionist that I preferred to live a lie than accept a flaw in myself I was responsible for.

Also, I wasn't the one who came up with the idea that the hesitations in my speech were caused by a condition that was beyond my control. Other people suggested this to me. It was just convenient for me to believe it, so I went along with it, milking it whenever I felt I needed a shield from the scary, complex, mysterious social world that I knew nothing of.

My lack of social experience, perfectionism, and the suggestions from others that the hesitations in my speech were caused by a condition beyond my control came together to create the perfect storm of factors for a chronic stuttering problem.

While I was working around the clock desperately trying to stop stuttering, I knew on a subconscious level that what I was doing was silly and the real solution was to simply learn how to interact with other people through observation and practice. My parents suggested this to me multiple times, but I felt the process would be too painful. It was easier on my ego to blame my lack of social success on my stutter, continue living in denial, and fantasize about how great my life will be when I finally manage to stop stuttering.

I believe this defense mechanism was also the reason I sometimes stuttered when practicing speaking in a room by myself. If I spoke fluently in this situation, I would have had to admit that I'm perfectly capable of speaking normally.

Why I Recovered

The most obvious factor that led to my recovery was a change in my life situation. I had just received a job offer and made a whole bunch of new friends. It increased my confidence in my social abilities. I realized that even though I had a fraction of the social experience most people my age had had, I wasn't as awkward as I feared I might be. One of the problems I was having previously was that I had almost nothing in common with the people I was attempting to befriend, but I had plenty in common with these new friends. This increased confidence led me to believe there was less risk I would say something that sounded bad. *I now trusted myself enough to be assertive.*

While chatting with my classmates, I realized that many of them were also socially awkward - some even more so than me. But I still accepted them for who they were and didn't think negatively of them because they were awkward. This allowed me to realize that being socially awkward isn't as big of a deal as I thought it was. It allowed me to accept my awkwardness, *reducing my need to hide it from myself and others.*

I no longer felt an extreme fear of being rejected because I now felt accepted by society. If I accidentally said something that sounded bad and was rejected for it, I knew I would be able to handle it because I was now confident in myself. I no longer had anything to prove to myself or others. I could just relax and be myself. *There was no longer a need to live in a fantasy because I was able to accept my reality.*

Now, if I get into a situation where I'm not sure how to put a thought into words, or I'm not sure what to say, I just accept it for what it is. I allow myself to hesitate if I feel the need, and because I feel ok with myself, I don't feel the need to force the words out while I'm hesitating. I feel a total sense of calm while speaking. Previously, I would go into a panic, and all I could think was "Do whatever you gotta do to get the words out NOW!"

Before, my focus was on trying to get the words out (including using speech techniques) without even thinking about what I actually wanted to say. But now I've realized that by doing this, I was unable to decide what I wanted to say or put it into words. This was the real reason my speech was getting hung up. Now I know my focus should be on what I want to say and whether or not I

truly want to say it. If I'm confident in what I'm saying and my intentions are clear, the words come out easily without any sort of effort at all.

My recovery began long before the stuttering behavior finally stopped. I first read *Redefining Stuttering* and *Speech is a River* six years before my breakthrough. These books allowed me to see stuttering from a new perspective and planted the idea in my mind that complete recovery is possible.

Shortly after this, while being coached by Andrew Greenstein, a person who recovered from stuttering by participating in a program put on by the National Center for Stuttering, he told me that the primary reason he stuttered was to allow himself to believe in a fantasy of having better social skills than he really had. As soon as I heard this, I felt it may be the case for me too. It seemed to make perfect sense given my life situation.

After hearing this, I decided to begin working on improving my social skills. I began consciously observing the way other people interacted, both on TV and in real life. I also began prioritizing my social life, accepting every invitation I could and inviting other people to do things as well. I started going to parties, bars and night clubs, sporting events, and going on camping trips with my friends. I also forced myself to begin asking girls on dates. This was WAY out of my comfort zone, but I did it anyway.

This process desensitized me to the fear I had of stuttering in front of others. I realized that nobody really cared about or thought much of my stutter. Without the fear of stuttering clouding my mind, I was able to think more clearly in the speaking situations I struggled in. This dramatically reduced the severity of my stutter. It also allowed me to become more aware of the true reason I was stuttering.

During this process, I was forced to consciously accept that there were many social skills I didn't know that most people my age already understood intuitively such as:

- What people talk about
- How they transition topics
- How they decide who gets to speak and when
- How they know it's time to exit a conversation
- How they do so gracefully
- How they invite other people to join things
- How to get themselves invited
- What humor is, when it should be used, and how to make jokes

This was compounded by the fact that I also had little knowledge about the things people generally talk about, such as sports, news, politics, movies and actors, YouTube comedy videos, parties, etc. I found myself constantly in the situation of not knowing how to socialize, not having anything to contribute to conversations, and not being able to get the words out even if I thought of something to say. I felt like a complete alien. It was mortifying seeing how socially hopeless I was compared to most people my age. Other people noticed this as well, at times mentioning how awkward I was and asking if I lived under a rock.

However, I gradually began to get the hang of socializing. I also improved my worldliness by increasing my awareness of things people tend to talk about. I began watching sports, the news, movies, and television series. This increased my confidence in myself, reducing the feeling that

I was about to say something dumb or awkward. It also narrowed the gap between the fantasy I was living in and my reality, reducing the need to live a lie. This set the stage for my recovery. If I hadn't done this, my social awkwardness may never have reduced to a level I could accept.

After this, I received speech coaching from another person who recovered named Lee Lovett (mentioned earlier). He has developed an extensive program with a wide variety of strategies including mind training and reading aloud (designed to convince the person who stutters that fluency is possible) and "crutches" or speech techniques to be used when one encounters a difficult word or situation to avoid stuttering.

One crutch I found helpful was writing what I was trying to say on a notepad and showing it to the listener while I was saying it. I mentioned earlier that I used this crutch at the recruiting event, and that whenever I began writing what I was trying to say, the words came out without a hitch. At the time, this seemed very strange to me. How could writing what I want to say cause the stutter to disappear? It certainly demonstrated to me that stuttering is a self-created problem that stems from cognitive factors rather than neurobiological abnormalities, but I couldn't figure out exactly what those cognitive factors were and why they caused me to stutter.

Now that I've gained a more thorough understanding of the problem, it's obvious to me why this worked. It broke through the defense mechanism. I was stuttering because I was subconsciously holding myself back from speaking, but if I wrote down what I was saying on paper, the listener would find out what I was saying anyway so there was no point holding back anymore.

Because I could no longer hold back when I feared that what I was about to say would reveal my awkwardness and lack of worldliness, I was forced to confront the reality that many of the things I say sound dumb and awkward. The acceptance of this fact was key to my recovery.

I later replaced this crutch with a different crutch I heard about from Paul Brocklehurst, a friend of Lee's. He used it to recover from stuttering. I'll explain how I used it and why I think it worked for me.

The main reason I had speech blocks was I felt I wouldn't be able to connect the first sound of the feared word to the second sound. Essentially, I felt a block between the two sounds. Because I wanted to say the whole word altogether, I would wait until I felt I could connect the two sounds before even starting to make the first sound.

So, what I did was, instead of waiting until I was ready to say the whole word altogether, I said the first sound as if it was the only sound I was going to say, and then immediately after making that sound, I said the rest of the word. I was almost always able to then say the rest of the word without a hitch.

I'll use my name as an example. Sometimes I felt like I was unable to connect the "A" to the "lex", so I felt the need to wait until this felt possible before starting to make the "A" sound. My crutch was to say the "A" sound on its own and then immediately afterward say the rest of my name.

The result was virtually completely normal sounding speech, with the first and second sound said only slightly more slowly than normal because I was deliberately making the first sound and then switching to the second sound. Nobody even noticed I was doing this.

After doing this for a while, I realized I didn't have to use any sort of trickery on myself anymore. I didn't even have to pretend the first sound was the only sound I was going to say. The simple solution was: if I ever felt the sensation of there being an "invisible hurdle" (the feeling that triggers speech blocks), I would simply ignore it and begin saying whatever the next sound was anyway.

This sounds counterintuitive because most people see stuttering as a problem where one's speech gets involuntarily hung up. However, for me, stuttering was an imaginary condition. There was nothing outside of my own imagination that caused the invisible hurdle. Even when I felt its presence, if I simply decided to begin saying the first sound of the feared word anyway, nothing ever got in the way. The "hang ups" were therefore completely voluntary. I simply stopped speaking because I decided to stop speaking. I was hesitating for reasons I was unaware of. Using this crutch forced me to accept this.

Because I believed the speech blocks were involuntary and there was nothing I could do to prevent them, my subconscious was able to continue playing this "trick" on me over and over. In the past, whenever I felt the invisible hurdle, I either stopped speaking and waited until I felt it had disappeared or began trying to "break free" of it with a variety of strategies such as facial contortions, swallowing, clicking noises, head jerks, filler words, etc. But in reality, there was **NOTHING AT ALL** to wait out or break free from. My subconscious mind now knew that it couldn't play any tricks on me anymore, so the invisible hurdles stopped appearing.

Think about this: if stuttering is a physical speech disorder, why would a single sound or word cause one's speech to suddenly freeze up for long periods of time? If a sound truly is difficult to say, wouldn't it make more sense to simply mispronounce the sound and continue speaking rather than wait a long period of time until one feels able to say the sound properly?

Consider someone learning a new language. They don't have "speech blocks" when they encounter a sound that's not part of their native language. They simply mispronounce it and continue talking. Also consider people with laryngitis, people who lost their voice because they have a cold, or even people who had to have their vocal folds surgically removed. These conditions interfere with vocal fold vibration, but they don't cause speech blocks. They just cause one to have to whisper, but the speech is still easily understandable. Therefore, *I could no longer use difficult letters/words or tense vocal folds as excuses for stopping my speech.*

This allowed me to realize there is no logical reason to ever allow "blocks" in my speech. It's much better to make a small pronunciation error or have a muffled sound or word than completely stop speaking. I could simply "blow over" the words I felt were difficult to say without allowing them to disrupt the forward flow of my speech.

When I felt I was about to get stuck, *I would simply force myself to move onto the next sound or word anyway*, without allowing myself to get caught up in the difficult sound. Even if the words came out somewhat mangled or slurred, it was still better than stopping to wait until I felt I could say them properly.

I realized this act of forcing myself to move forward is key. Think about this: if a person who stutters is attempting to say the word "stutter," it would likely come out like sssssssssssss.....ssssssss.... ssssssstutter. If we adopt the perspective that the word is inherently difficult to say, which exact sound is the problem? The "s" sound? Of course not. The person had no trouble beginning to make that sound. He just made it for an excessively long

period of time because he refused to move onto the “t” sound. Is it the “t” then? This sound is simply made by putting the tongue behind the front teeth and letting out air before making the “u” sound. And the “u” sound is simply made by vibrating the vocal folds while the lips and tongue are in a certain position. A similar process repeats with the next syllable.

There is nothing inherently difficult about producing any of these sounds. Even toddlers and parrots can do this. *The real issue is refusing to move onto the next sound.*

One might argue that the difficulty is in saying the whole word altogether, so the person who stutters may wait until this feels possible. However, it’s the waiting that’s the real problem. If we think of a word as a sequence of sounds that we are easily and naturally able to produce without consciously thinking about it, it becomes obvious that there’s no logical reason to wait to begin saying the first sound. And once the first sound is said, there’s no logical reason not to begin saying the second sound, and so on.

Paul Brocklehurst’s crutch allowed me to realize this. I reasoned that if I can say any sound in isolation, I can say any word since words are simply a series of sounds. Whenever I got stuck, *I just had to say the next sound as if I was only going to say that one sound.*

After realizing this, whenever I found myself hung up on a word, it became obvious to me that I was simply hesitating to speak or holding myself back. I no longer had any other reason to pause in my speech. If I truly wanted to, I could simply move onto the next sound.

While this seems obvious to me now, it certainly was a hard pill to swallow and took a while to fully accept. Once I did, I could no longer rely on my stutter whenever I needed an easy scapegoat or felt that a social interaction was too difficult to handle. Now it was all on me. I had to take full responsibility for my social awkwardness. I could no longer justify my lack of success with the fact that I’m at a significant disadvantage. I don’t believe I ever would have been able to fully accept this if I hadn’t made a conscious effort to gain social experience, improve my social skills, and increase my worldliness.

As soon as I realized I was *choosing* to hesitate, the reason why became obvious. I was then able to quickly decide whether or not I truly did want to say what I was originally intending to say.

After this, I never again felt the dreadful sensation of being unable to get a word out without knowing why. The secret was out. The nightmare was over. And I knew it.

I’d like to sincerely thank Paul Brocklehurst, Lee Lovett, John Harrison, Ruth Mead, Barbara Dahm, and Andrew Greenstein. Their insights and advice allowed me to see stuttering from new perspectives, giving me a better understanding of the nature of the problem.

I would love to brainstorm and discuss these ideas with others who stutter. If you would like to chat, shoot me an email at abernard811@gmail.com.

I'm No Longer Powerless

by Kelly Conroy Smith

Before starting this journey to the center of my stuttering, I viewed my struggle as solely a speech problem. I was certain stuttering was something that occurred outside myself and was only present when I opened my mouth to speak. Once I finally stopped referring to my problem as stuttering and replaced it with “holding back,” it was as though this whole new side of myself was revealed to me.

Once this seed had been planted, my mind became relentless in figuring out more about my tendency to hold back from my true self. I began scanning my past experiences and having really honest conversations with my inner self about my current beliefs, not only about my speech but about how I did or did not relate to my inner self.

My whole life I'd been fed the idea that I had inherited my stuttering from my father, that it was purely neurological, and there was nothing to do other than accept this part of myself and carry on. But for me the idea of stuttering as a purely genetic happening was so panic-inducing because I saw it as a prison that was being forced upon me, and not something that I myself was actually perpetuating. I see now that the stuttering was just the byproduct of my mind's learned decision to hold back, blanketed under the false belief that I was powerless to do anything about it.

Growing up, I never got angry. I was so afraid of people in general that I didn't think I had a right to be angry with anyone. I secretly felt powerless, but it was not something that I yet recognized. My tendency to avoid anger was further influenced by the harsh household that I was brought up in and as well as always feeling that I had to be perfect and proper to avoid the yelling and verbal explosions of my parental authority figures.

From a young age my view of myself lay in the eyes of others and for that reason speech could never be unconscious and free as it was intended to be because my life at the time didn't allow for such behavior. Pleasing others became a mode of self-preservation and a way to find happiness, or at least a sense of peace.

Being a person who is highly sensitive, it feels as though your receptors are turned on high volume at all times so pleasing others can take a toll on your sense of self. As a child who endured emotional trauma, when it came to what I wanted, I was emotionally knocked down and shamed for being assertive. This then led to this fundamental belief that there was something “wrong” within myself, something that needed to keep hidden.

Thus the holding back mentality was born out of necessity for survival.

Even later as a young adult I found it very hard to know what I wanted out of life or who I wanted to be because I had this subconscious belief that I had no right to ask for anything. I believed that I was only as good as what life would let me have, but asking for anything, like getting angry, seemed out of the question. I was stuck in this controlled state, a total repression of my inner self.

It wasn't until my late 20s that I realized I'd kept a lot of these unhealthy habits from my childhood and brought them to my adult life. Avoiding the truth and making people happy only goes so far.

You start to wake up the realities of your behavior. Realizing this was a hard pill for me to swallow, but a necessary one nonetheless.

As I gained career promotions, I one day found myself in the position of a Corporate Catering Manager & Logistics Coordinator. Yet I was left feeling like an imposter. On paper I had earned that position. I was experienced. And I had more than the proper schooling. But I still felt like I wasn't worthy because of my speech problems. The powerlessness it inflicted upon me made me feel "less than."

That's the frustrating part about being a person who stutters — knowing what you are capable of deep down but being unable to represent yourself in a way that is conducive to your potential. Yet that's exactly what I was doing to myself. That's when I finally realized no one else had these thoughts about me, and no one else was putting me inside this box except my own mind. This prison I had tried so hard to avoid my entire life was of my own design and something I was manifesting within myself.

I realized I was an adult still listening to childhood tendencies of feeling powerless. It takes a while for these ideas to dissipate from our lives as we grow. And in order for this to happen we must first realize that we're doing it. That realization was the long awaited first step for my inner recovery from this self-inflicted powerless imprisonment my mind was currently living in.

As this journey has progressed, I've realized that for me the goal was never to gain full fluency, because I truly don't believe that I owe anyone my fluency at this point. Rather I owe it to myself to not hold back and to silence the conscious censor that I, myself, placed on my speech from a young age.

Speech should be a free-flowing unconscious act that is colored by our emotions and true feelings. When I'm able to speak fluently now, I'm no longer shocked and bewildered. And when I see myself holding back, I'm aware of the changes I need to make to get me to where I want to be. Stuttering for me is no longer a mystery or a random attack that overtakes me out of nowhere,. That's because I've studied it as it correlates to my inner beliefs and perceptions.

I believe the journey to freer speech isn't one that most traditional speech therapy can answer for us. Rather it takes a transformation of the *whole self*, starting with those false beliefs I gained from early childhood and a rebuilding of those delicate inner workings that fan the flames of that destructive impulse to hold back.

The liberating reality is that I am no longer powerless.
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Chronic Stuttering: A Conflict of Control Systems

by John C. Harrison

Have you ever had to take a pee *really really* bad...and you weren't near a bathroom? Sure you have. Everyone's been in that situation at least once in their life. Maybe you're on a flight, and just as the plane approaches the airport, you realize you have to take a BIG leak *and you might not make it* to the airport rest room. So you grit your teeth and clamp down on your sphincter muscle....and pray.

"Oh...my...god..." you mutter under your breath. "Please god, don't let me have to pee in my pants." And by marshaling every bit of control you have, you manage to hold in the urine while the plane lands and rolls up to the gate. You stand up and clamp your teeth together while the line moves *ever so slowly* out of the plane and into the airport.

"*Where is the men's room?*" you frantically shout to an airport employee. He points down the hallway. You burst open the door to the men's room, leap for the nearest urinal, and just get out your johnson *one second* before the pee starts running out.

Thank god! You made it! Just.

REALLY? After waiting all that time, you actually timed it down to the very last *second*?

Not really. Instead of exquisite timing, you were experiencing the functioning of your unconscious, Automatic Control System.

Conscious vs. unconscious control

Human beings have *two separate control systems* for managing behaviors. One is the *Conscious Control System* that comes into play whenever you're learning a new operation. The other is the *unconscious Automatic Control System* that's used to automatically manage the *running* of the operation after you've mastered the basics. These two systems operate very differently and are used for different purposes.

Conscious control is called into play whenever you're in the learning stages of a multi-phase operation. For example, in learning how to serve a tennis ball, you need to know how high to throw the ball, how far to bring back the racquet, how far to bend your body, how to shift your weight, how to swing the racquet and how to follow through. These actions are executed fully consciously and are practiced until they are rehearsed enough to be relegated to your Automatic Control System.

When the operation is handed off to the automatic control system, the operation shifts to an unconscious modality that is able to control highly complex functions.

The conscious mind is taken out of play, and the control and management of the operation is now managed on a feeling/emotional/unconscious level.

When the golfer at the practice tee buys a bucket of golf balls and hits shot after shot after shot, he is trying to “groove” his swing by training his automatic control system to repeat the same behaviors in exactly the same way, over and over again. The reason so much repetition is required is that there are many distractions in golf that can cause the player to inadvertently modify his swing.

Some of these distractions are external and some are internal.

— For example he may be spooked by the presence of a pond to the right of the fairway and find it hard to stifle an impulse to pull the ball to the left.

— He may have previously dropped a similar shot into the water and is now distrusting his ability to hit a shot strong and true enough to run alongside or carry over the water.

— He may believe that successfully making the shot is beyond his skill set at the moment.

Whatever the reason, he doesn’t fully trust himself to surrender conscious control to his Automatic Control System. As a result, he holds back ever so little, and he ends up hitting a bad shot.

Giving up conscious control

I was watching television the other day when I saw a stunning documentary on world famous tightrope walker Nik Wallenda. In this hair-raising sequence Wallenda crossed a gorge at Arizona’s Grand Canyon on a 1500-foot cable with no safety nets or harness. And all the while he was carefully taking step after step, I was thinking, “How do you acquire the confidence to do something like that, especially if you’re doing it for the first time?”

You have to train and then learn to *trust* your unconscious, automatic controls to keep you in balance.

If the tightrope walker fights that vulnerable feeling, he might interfere with the subtle timing needed to maintain his exquisite balance. He has to be comfortable with and welcome the vulnerable feeling, find it exciting, and use those emotions to fully commit himself and energize his activity.

The same with the golfer. If he can trust enough to still hold onto the feeling of *letting go* and maintain a confident, devil-my-care attitude, he will feel confident enough to hand over control to his unconscious mind and “allow the shot to shoot itself”...or so it will feel to him.

And the shot will go straight and true. At least he hopes it will.

But then what should he do if he misses the shot and plunks it in the water?

He needs to not panic, but instead, he wants to *revitalize* how he wants to hit the ball and then renew his trust in his automatic control system when he hits the next shot...*even though it might make him feel very vulnerable to do so.*

On the other hand, if he panics and does not surrender to the body movements he has been practicing, *he will wrest control of the swing out of its automaticity and shove it back into the realm of conscious control.*

Then like as not, his anxiety will cause him to jerk or tighten the club, and he'll hit a bad shot.

This is analogous to what happens when a person gets locked in a speech block. For whatever reason, the person has a sudden fear that he cannot automatically say a particular word, sound or syllable. Rather than trusting the speaking process and relaxing his way through the anxiety, he panics and gives up on the automatic vocalizing movements that are called for.

And he holds back by tightening his throat, holding his breath, consciously controlling his lips and tongue, or repeating the previous word or sounds until he feels it's safe to go on.

In this struggle, the individual has wrested control of his speech away from his automatic control mechanisms. On one hand he needs to say the feared word in order to complete his thought. But on the other hand he tries to protect himself from the unpleasant feelings by constantly picturing his *inability* to say the feared word and attempting to consciously control his vocalizing.

Two control systems in conflict with one another

As a result, he ends up with two forces of equal strength pulling him in opposite directions in what is commonly called a speech block.

Speak. And hold back. Two opposite intentions operating at cross purpose. As he continues trying to say the feared word or sound, his intentions cancel out each other. So what do we end up with? You got it. A speech block. Yet all the individual is aware of is that some mysterious "force" is stopping him from speaking.

But even as eminent a golfer as Tiger Woods knows that he will periodically hit the less than perfect shot. And when he does, he does not allow a miss to change his self-regard. He is still THE Tiger Woods. He knows who he is, what he believes, and what his skills are. And if he misses too many times in a round, then it's off to the practice tee after the round is over. This practice will allow him to continue trusting his Automatic Control System.

Remember when you learned to ride a bicycle?

I remember when I learned. I climbed on the bicycle and my father ran next to me holding up the bike while I pedaled. He did this over several days. I remember thinking "This is impossible!" but I kept at it.

A day passed when I didn't ride, and then the next afternoon I went out into the back yard and saw the bike leaning on a small grassy hill in our driveway. The thought came that maybe I could ride it by myself. So, I mounted the bike, gingerly pushed off, and tried to duplicate the *feeling* I had when my father was running next to me. Suddenly I was riding all by myself, and I've been riding ever since. My powerful, unconscious Automatic Control System had taken over control of the process.

Now let me pose a very different scenario. Let us say that you, an experienced cyclist, have to ride over a very narrow bridge with no side railings that crosses a VERY steep ravine which drops

off several hundred feet on either side of the road. Would your anxiety level rise? You bet it would. Would you remain upright or start to falter? What would stop you from losing your balance and falling into the ravine?

In this situation you need to trust yourself to let go, even when it feels dangerous to do so. You need to focus on the excitement of riding the bike and crossing the bridge. And then give control to your more powerful *Unconscious Control System*. That takes practice and building confidence, especially in scary circumstances.

It's the same process in learning how become a good speaker. If you've already developed the holding back pattern known as chronic stuttering, look for personal growth programs in which you can learn to spontaneously and expressively let go and express yourself as YOU — as the *real* you — in a totally safe environment with all the attendant *fun* that that entails. *Learn to give yourself permission to be as BIG as you want to be so you can surrender your speaking to your Automatic Control System.*

Learn how to make it fun.

Things you can do to build confidence.

If you want to dissolve your stuttering fears, you have to speak, but in a setting that allows you to trust and build confidence in your automatic (unconscious) controls.

Join Toastmasters or another speakers club.

Join a chapter of a stuttering self-help group that might be near you.

Look for enlightened, fun-oriented therapists like Barbara Dahm and enjoyable therapy programs like the McGuire training which incorporate *letting go* as an integral part of their programs.

Look for as many opportunities as possible to make speaking *fun*, where you can really be you in the fullest sense of the word, where you can be the real you, the lyrical you, the quirky you, the creative you. Find groups in which there's no way to lose by standing up and expressing who you feel like being, even though you may initially struggle to get the words out.

Remember the phrase, "What doesn't kill you will make you stronger"? This particularly applies to the holding back patterns in your speech.

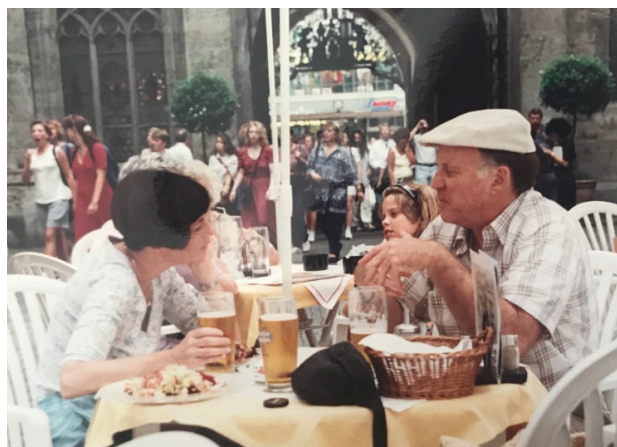
At the very least, start replacing the word *stuttering* with the words *holding back*. To do so will help to take the mystery and curse out of the disability that has plagued you since you were very young. It will stop you from making stuttering a mysterious *thing* that has a life of its own. And it will help you build the belief that effective verbal self-expression is totally within your grasp.

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Equating Treatment of Stuttering with Success

by Barbara Dahm CCC-SLP; BCS-F



I first met Barbara Dahm at a conference in Munich, Germany in 1994, and she was the very first SLP who shared the same perspective about stuttering that I had. We've stayed in touch since then, and I count her as one of the few really enlightened speech pathologists I've met who have a keen understanding of the true nature of the stuttering and blocking system. — JH

The outcome of stuttering therapy has not been encouraging. Even when the standard of success is downgraded from recovery to progress, Walt Manning (1996) reports that one-third of clients will make good progress; one-third moderate progress; one-third little or no progress. As a clinician who exclusively treats people who stutter, I think these findings are unacceptable. This is the reason that I did not stick with the traditional stuttering modification and fluency shaping approaches that were being used when I began to treat people who stutter.

At first, I tried using these approaches, then I tried to improve the way I carried them out. Using careful observation, I began to discover what really helped and didn't help my clients. I realized that the treatment perspective was part of the reason clients were having such a difficult and frustrating therapy experience. Stuttering modification focuses on moments of stuttering and fluency shaping focuses on trying to make the speech fluent by using some artificial and hard to use control techniques. These are actually two sides of the same continuum, speech. Neither approach relates to the system within every person that functions to create speech. I realized that we need to look at how this system is doing its job. Using the model of how fluent speech is produced, I explored how the system works to create stuttered speech. Here is an equation that I think summarizes a lot of what I've found:

$S = (T + W + GO) \pm \text{PARET}$

S, of course, stands for STUTTERING (stammering). I define stuttering, not as the problem that people who stutter face, but as the result of the problem. In essence, the problem is that the brain does not function in a way that allows for the production of comfortable, easy to produce flowing

speech. That brings us to the other side of the equation, the side that includes brain processes and the person's state of mind.

T stands for TRYING. People who stutter TRY to speak. People who speak fluently do not try to speak anymore than people in general "try" to write, walk, eat, etc. These are activities that we learn how to do at an early age and continue to do them automatically without thought or effort. Speaking is also meant to be an automatic process. This is a requirement for producing normally fluent speech. The automatic mode does not involve pre-editing what you will say, listening to what you have said, or using the control mode to move your mouth to form the sounds.

W stands for words. People who stutter are in some way word conscious. In fact, words are not the unit of speech production. However, to some degree, at least some of the time, people who stutter use the whole word as the unit of speaking. The more aware you are of the words you are saying or want to say, the harder it is to speak.

GO stands for GET OUT. We all use this term when we refer to talking, as in the idiom, "He didn't let me get a word out". However, people who stutter literally use a motor process that attempts to get out what they want to say. Normally fluent speakers do not do this. They develop language in the brain as a progression of speech sounds. When they want people to hear this inner language, they activate the voice in the larynx in an easy effortless way. At the same time, the mouth subconsciously shapes the voice so that the end result is an audible progression of speech sounds that make up syllables that make up words that make up language.

PARET relates to PERSPECTIVE, ATTITUDE, REACTIONS, EMOTIONS, THOUGHTS. In addition to what might be innate developmental tendencies, the degree and way the speaker TRIES TO GET OUT WORDS is usually affected by some or all of PARET. PARET can either support the process that creates stuttering, or the ability to change and transform your way of speaking into an automatic and natural process. PARET is an important aspect of treatment. The individual cannot change the way the brain creates speech when thoughts and feelings are working against change.

If $S = (T + W + GO) +/- PARET$, therapy needs show people how speech can be generated without TRYING TO GET OUT WORDS. Dynamic Stuttering Therapy does this. Clients carry out activities that achieves these goals:

1. Let the brain automatically develop language as a sequence of speech sounds
2. Activate the voice in an effortless way that allows for the normal intonation of speech
3. Allow the mouth to function on an automatic mode
4. Completely give up monitoring speech, pre-editing, listening to how the speech sounds, visualizing words and other forms of control,
5. PARET changes, according to individual needs, so as to support the new way of processing speech. This is done through discussion, meditation, cognitive therapy and experience.

None of the goals for changing the way you speak include TRYING to make the speech fluent. If there is one thing that almost everyone who knows anything about stuttering and its nature agrees upon, it is that the more you TRY to be fluent, the more you stutter. Some people might also agree with me that more you TRY to monitor your speech, the more effortful it will be to talk, even if there are less or no actual perceived blocks, repetitions and prolongations.

Dynamic Stuttering Therapy shares some common elements with stuttering modification therapy, cognitive behavioral therapies, and mindfulness training. However, what makes Dynamic Stuttering Therapy unique is that at the same time that people who stutter work at changing their state of mind, they are also working directly to train their brain to use the same natural automatic process of speech production that is used by fluent speakers.

Changing both your state of mind and the neurological process of speaking is a winning combination. Using the new process gives you a new experience. Awareness of the experience stimulates new feelings. At the same time, thinking in a different way alters your reactions and lets you use the new process. Therapy becomes an evolution of the self. The end result is an easier and more enjoyable way of speaking. Clients report that they feel greater physical and mental comfort when they achieve the treatment goals. Instead of being concerned about how to get the words out, they are able to communicate their thoughts. This is, of course, the reason we speak.

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I Had to Learn to Stutter with Confidence

by Mike Wilson

In high school, I certainly didn't consider myself a "resilient" person. During freshman year, upon hearing that I would have to give a speech in history class, I distinctly remember the feeling that I was being sucked down into a vortex with no way to stop the free-fall.

For the better part of two months, I dwelled incessantly on the fact that I was about to completely embarrass myself and become the laughingstock of my school. I had moved to that area only the year before, and after having been made fun of by a few kids at my previous school, I had decided to mute myself rather than giving people ammunition to use against me.

This upcoming speech in history class was a terrifying chance to be completely exposed for the freak that I believed myself to be. I remember spending many mornings looking out of the school bus window and wishing that I had been born a dog, so that there would be no expectation to speak. Since changing my species wasn't an option, I sometimes wondered if death would be preferable.

After two months of living in dread, it was finally time to give the speech. Reluctantly I stepped in front of the class and started with "Genghis Khan was ..." and I couldn't get the word "born" out to save my life. In those days, I absolutely hated the sound of my stuttering so I always chose to silently block until the word came out "right".

So there I was, silently contorting my facial muscles all over the place for two or three minutes. It felt like an hour, and when nothing ever came out, I finally sat down in total shame. My worst nightmare had played out, and I braced for the story to spread around the school like wildfire.

A couple of weeks after this, I found out that I had to give ANOTHER presentation, this time on an invention we had to do for science class. Once again, dread and anxiety took over. I knew that I could not repeat the Genghis Khan debacle, and that I needed a different strategy going into this presentation. The best plan I could come up with was to say the filler phrase "you know" whenever a tough word came up, as that sometimes seemed to break words free. Maybe the trick would enable me to fool everybody.

When the day finally came, I probably said "you know" 300 times in a 15 minute speech. "And this is the, you know, you know, you know, you know, you know, you know, you know, you know, you know, you know, you know, the water bottle holder". I believed then that repeating the same filler phrase 10 times in a row, and appearing like I knew next to nothing about my invention was preferable to people knowing the truth.

Fast forward three years to my senior year of high school, when neither of my only two friends, and the only two people in the school I was comfortable talking to, happened to be in my lunch period. Rather than just finding a lunch table to sit at with other people, I chose to hide in the

bathroom stall for lunch that entire year. I made the choice that I'd rather run the risk of being discovered as the weirdo hiding in the bathroom, rather than having my dirty little speaking secret exposed. I also was, in effect, choosing to smell everybody's stuff who came in to use the bathroom over the course of that year. Good times.

Needless to say, my stuttering iceberg, and the accompanying sense of inferiority, ran incredibly deep during that stage of my life.

Four months later, as a freshman in college at Florida State University, the "bounce back" began. You see, that's when I started learning to look people in the eye when I stuttered. The head of the FSU speech department introduced no speaking techniques for that entire first semester, he just brought me around campus and made me look random strangers in the eye as I asked them questions.

It took several sessions, and he probably had to remind me about a thousand times not to look away when stuttering, but eventually I got to the point where I was able to look people in the eye regardless of whether it was a fluent moment or a stuttering moment.

Within a matter of a couple of months, this changed my entire psychological state of mind with regards to my stuttering.

Once I broke that old habit of looking away in shame, I quickly realized that looking people in the eye made it clear to them that I had a stutter, that I wasn't finished talking, and that the appropriate thing for them to do was to sit there and patiently listen to me. It shocked me to discover that the vast majority of people complied, once they got beyond that initial moment of surprise and confusion at seeing something that they had never seen before. I realized that I COULD actually say what I wanted to say in this world, even if it took me longer.

Armed with this experience, I promised myself I would never again not say something just because I knew I would stutter.

I developed the perspective, "if you have a problem with my stutter, no worries, GO HANG OUT WITH SOMEBODY ELSE. Get out of here, and don't let the door hit you on the rear end as you leave". I started using my stutter as a way to evaluate OTHER people's character, rather than it being the metric of my own self-worth. In other words, "whatever you do here, I'm watching you."

As it turned out, I found it EXTREMELY rare that anybody would show me disrespect because I stuttered, at least after the initial second or two of confusion. Once they figured out that I had a speech impediment, which they realized much faster when I looked them in the eye during disfluencies, they became respectful and patient. I can only count two people in the 25 years since I developed the habit of eye contact who have disrespected me due to my stutter, and both of them were drunk.

The truth is that most fluent people know virtually nothing about this speech impediment, as they've never met a person who stutters before. However, they do all know what it means when a fluent person stutters, namely that the person doesn't know exactly what they want to say or are just stumbling over their words. This is intuitively funny to fluent speakers, as shown by the fact that when they stutter, they often times laugh at the disfluent moment and say "haha I can't even talk right now." Therefore, most listeners associate stuttering with that type of stumbling that all fluent speakers do from time to time. That's what they initially think is happening with us, not that we have a speech impediment.

As soon as they realize what's going on, whether they figure it out on their own or because we tell them about our stutter, they become really nice. Sometimes they even become a little embarrassed about their initial reaction. Either way, space is cleared for us to be who we really are by saying what we really want to say.

As a result of this new knowledge that people were actually way cooler about my speech impediment than I previously thought, I stopped assuming that everybody's mind was full of negative thoughts with regards to my speech. After all, most people are much more concerned with their own problems than other people's problems, and anybody who does take the time to think about it logically would realize that it takes honesty and courage to consistently speak up despite having a stuttering challenge.

I think every culture on earth respects honesty and courage. By facing our fears, looking people in the eye, and saying what we want to say, regardless of how smoothly it might come out, we become a source of inspiration to others by encouraging them to stop shrinking from their life challenges as well.

After this change in mentality, I still stuttered just about every time I talked, but I was able to become a dentist, get married, start a family, and become the founder of my dental practices, which now have 30 doctors and 210 staff working for me. They're all fluent.

Stuttering doesn't have to stop us from doing anything in life.

All of this is not to deny that we will sometimes experience winds of resistance from the fluent world.

When I had my mock dental school interview in my last year of college, one of the professors sat forward before it started and said earnestly to me "now Michael just so you know, you're going to have to talk to people as a dentist." I said "thanks for letting me know, now let's proceed with the practice interview."

Five years later, in my residency in Brooklyn, I was questioning one of the lead dentists about the logistical details of opening my first dental practice, and he said "now Michael do you know that as an owner you're not just gonna have to talk to patients, you're gonna have to talk to vendors

and staff too? There's a lot of talking." I thanked him for letting me know and continued with the questions.

Because they had seen me battle my way through syllables and were probably only trying to make my future life easier, I didn't hold any hard feelings towards these two professors. I simply decided to use their skepticism about my career choices as motivation to prove people wrong.

Eleanor Roosevelt famously said, "no one can make us feel inferior without our consent." By staying quiet, by not speaking up when we want to, and by looking away in shame when we speak, many of us have, in effect, consented to the idea that stuttering makes us inferior.

It doesn't have to be like this. In the vast majority of cases, the world can, and will, sit there and be patient and respectfully listen. But they can't possibly do this if we choose to muzzle ourselves and stay quiet.

Stuttering REALLY is ok, despite the painful childhood memories that we all carry around with us. It is ok to be ourselves. By going out there and looking people in the eye and saying what we really want to say, we show the world what a person who stutters looks like, as well as helping to teach people patience, tolerance, and empathy.

In doing so we can also help turn other people into better human beings, while at the same time spreading awareness that people who stutter are able to communicate and thrive in this world and achieve as much as anybody else. It may just take us longer to get the words out.

That's it.

In promoting this attitude we can become powerful advocates of equality, both for ourselves and for any individuals determined to say what they want to say.

Mike Wilson is a person who stutters, husband, father of four, dentist, and entrepreneur. He's a passionate stuttering advocate, host of the "Stutter with Confidence" podcast, and facilitator of a Zoom support group of people who stutter in which he encourages people to go out and face their fear of speaking. Mike grew up in Atlanta, GA, and now lives in Syracuse, NY. He is the founder and owner of five dental practices in upstate NY, and he enjoys spending time with his family, playing basketball, tennis, hiking, camping, and reading history.

Working From The Inside Out: A "Soul-Directed" Approach To Stuttering Therapy

by Marjorie Foer M.A., CCC-SLP; BCS-F

I met Marjorie Foer over 30 years ago, and she was the first speech therapist I had encountered who really espoused the whole concept of the Stuttering Hexagon. Through the years, she has used the holistic approach with her clients to resolve chronic stuttering and blocking with great success. — JH

Mark Twain once said, "One learns through the heart, not the eyes or the intellect." This "learning through the heart" has been called many names, including our Inner Guidance System, our Inner Wisdom, our Personal Truth, our Higher Self.

A medical doctor from England, Christine Page, uses what she calls a "Soul Directed Approach" for healing. Probably the most common label is simply "Intuition." Intuition resides within all of us, and it is a very powerful guide that is usually ignored, misunderstood and even criticized. But when intuition is heeded, it typically feels expansive and light. And when we ignore our Intuition, we may sense Feelings of tightness or anxiety in different places in the body, or Feel as if we are not our True Self.

This paper will look at the role of "Intuition" as it relates to working with people who stutter.

There are times when all speakers carefully choose words. At these times we can feel our energy shift to our conscious mind. This way of speaking is not an efficient way to speak. It takes too much energy from the body to efficiently maintain the conscious behavior. People who do not stutter usually "hyper" focus on their word choices at very specific times.

From my perspective, People Who Stutter (PWS) teach themselves to speak primarily in a hyper-focused, conscious way.

There is a **Belief** that speech will be blocked, and a **Feeling** of fear associated with blocking. Humans respond to fear with Fight, Flight or Play Dead (or Dumb). PWS Fight the fear with consciously produced speech, trying to rush or force words out. PWS Flee when they avoid words, sounds and situations.

They Play Dumb by giving incorrect answers, or no answer in an effort to avoid certain words or sounds or **Feelings**. When blocks, hesitations, repetitions, anticipations and avoidance **Behaviors** start, the conscious mind becomes aware that something is out of balance and tries to come to the rescue.

The conscious mind **Believes** that because it can think, reason and use language, that it must take control of talking. It therefore overrides the unconscious mind. The conscious mind wins because the unconscious mind doesn't really know how to "speak up for itself"; it is basically a silent partner in the communication business.

Here are some other familiar convictions held in the **Belief** System: "I am a stutterer", "I will stutter on 'L', 'B', my name, etc.", "I am no good because I stutter, and even worse since I am in therapy and can't stop stuttering". When **Beliefs** are this strong, it is difficult to **Believe** an opposing

message. Especially, when one is validated and diagnosed as a "stutterer". When **Beliefs** are entrenched, the **Beliefs** can determine one's choices, such as how one **Perceives** oneself and others and how one **Intends** to act in the moment.

When the PWS **Perceives** him or herself as a stutterer, it can become such a predominant **Perception**, that there may be little room for other aspects of the Self. When one's **Perception** of Self is limited to "how lousy I am at talking", that is a very powerful and damaging **Perception**. In addition, the **Perceptions** of others are like a virus. So, if I **Perceive** myself as having a mild stutter, but I realize that the listeners are focusing on how I am talking rather than on what I am saying, I will also focus on how I talk. My **Perceptual Radar** reads their concerns and I try to improve my speech using consciously controlled speech. My focus on improving my speech and failing with this approach, validates that I am a confirmed stutterer. Then my Perception of my stuttering changes from mild to moderate or severe, just because I **Believe** my stuttering is that way.

My **Perception** of myself and my speech is distorted, but I work toward making my reality match my **Belief** that I am a severe stutterer..

You can bet that with my **Belief** System telling me that "I am a stutterer", my **Perceptual** System telling me that "I stutter, therefore I am" and my **Intentions** to speak fluently constantly backfiring on me, that my **Emotions** will be working overtime.

The typical Feelings associated with stuttering include: fear, embarrassment, shame, guilt, anger, pain, frustration, hate, worthlessness, and depression. Unfortunately, most PWS learn to bury these **Feelings**, or at least minimize them so that they can carry on with day to day life. **Feelings** emanate from the heart. When **Feelings** are ignored, or set aside, the entire Human System can be stalled, or disengaged from life. Clearly, **Feelings** are a vital part of our Human Machinery and they need to be acknowledged and respected. They are the messenger telling us who we truly are and what we need, and we all know not to shoot the messenger. **Feelings** are also an important link to our **Intuition**.

Intuition is one's personal Truth. The stuttering **Behaviors** (blocks, eye blinks, breath changes, etc.) are all counter-Intuitive to natural speech production, but they are the most recognizable part of the Stuttering System. **Intuition** says Relax! But once a PWS hears that, they may start to tense up, feel hot or get that tight feeling in their throat or stomach. Those reactions are the Physiological Responses to the **Behaviors** of stuttering. Why isn't **Intuition** working? Because it hasn't been trusted for a while, so the other components of the System overpower **Intuition**, and keep the Stuttering System in a state of equilibrium.

The words in bold highlight the seven components of the "Stuttering Web" which I believe create and maintain the Stuttering System. John Harrison first conceptualized the "Stuttering Hexagon" as presented below. I added **Intuition** to the model, and placed it in the center, where the six Hexagon elements intersect. John recognized the "Higher Self" as essential for dissolving his stuttering, but he did not include it on the Web. To me, **Intuition** is a vital part of being human, and an essential element for creating and maintaining anything in equilibrium.

John Harrison is one of my heroes. He figured out what made him stutter, and successfully "dissolved his stuttering", as he likes to say. John conceived the Stuttering System as a habit that

needed to be observed, dissected, analyzed, and dissolved. He believed that once the components of the System were understood, the System could be disarmed. John believed this because he knew something deep down in his bones. John knew that he had created his Stuttering System and therefore it was something that he could just as likely stop.

Have you (therapist) ever tried to change a behavior of yours that you didn't like? The **Behavior** may be eating, smoking, exercising, relationship management, gambling, personal financial management, or even how fast you drive. Were you successful? How did you go about making this change? Einstein said "No problem was ever solved in the same consciousness with which it was created." Therefore, to effect change, the PWS must move to another state of consciousness or Perspective. To make a personal change, one must understand what created the undesired **Behavior** in the first place. Then one Intentionally untangles the unconscious Web of **Behaviors** associated with that one problem

When a PWS seeks a speech-language pathologist for assistance, that person is seeking change. The client typically focuses on changing the way they talk, after all, it seems that that's the problem. After a few sessions, pieces of a puzzle start to float into place and a picture of the person starts to come into focus. The client not only has difficulty speaking, the client has *fears* about speaking. This person also expresses other **Feelings**, mentioned above. When asked what the PWS does with these **Feelings**, an early response is typically, "I don't know, stuff them somewhere I suppose."

In my private practice, I use an interview process that I developed based on the seven elements in the Stuttering Web. The interview procedure helps me and my client understand how my client's stuttering components play roles and maintain their homeostasis in my client's life.

The interview format is typically used as a guide. The questions are reformulated and personalized as the interview progresses. For example, when my 16 year old client revealed that he knew (**Belief**) that he would have a hard time answering questions in class, I tailored the follow up questions to find out more about his **Intentions, Emotions, Perceptions, Physiological Responses, Behaviors** and **Intuition** for that situation. He and I saw a pattern as he explained that these intrinsic elements manifested themselves in similar ways when he had to make a phone call, make small talk with less familiar people or meet new people with whom he will continue to develop a relationship. It became clear to him that stuttering was much more complex than the typical difficulties with his speech **Behaviors**.

Speech **Behaviors** may be the most visible and measurable sign of stuttering. Changing the speech **Behavior**, however, is not necessarily how to help the client transform how they **Perceive** and **Feel** about themselves and others.

During the interview, I find out what the client expects therapy to be like, what they believe the outcomes will be, and who they believe is the primary person responsible for making the changes. If the client has stated that s/he can speak easily when alone, or when speaking to animals, children, or when acting, etc., I explain that I will not be teaching a new way of talking (stuttering modification or fluency enhancing strategies), because s/he has revealed that natural fluency already exists within them.

Our job, in therapy, is to discover how to allow that natural fluency to surface, and to reclaim it as their primary way of talking. I show the client the Stuttering Web and how the components interact to keep the Stuttering System alive. The client begins to **Perceive** stuttering as something that is theirs to study, own and dissolve. They understand why the therapist cannot be the FIXER, and why they have to take full responsibility for change. This all happens in the first session.

This interview and discovery process is repeated as the therapy sessions continue. I usually start each session with an update interview to see how homework is going. The discovery process might happen during a discussion session or during a guided imagery session. We start the guided imagery by closing eyes and taking deep breaths. I may offer a choice of two, or suggest one type of journey that is designed to help my client discover more about their Stuttering System.

We go on journeys inside the body and talk to the seven components of the Web, we journey to distant planets via these guided images and find Inner Wisdom and courage that has been buried for years. We travel to the places and people who present personal challenges, but only through the work of the mind, body and soul. When the client journeys using guided imagery, they speak through the unconscious mind, and their words flow. They reclaim their true speaking abilities and connect with their **Perceptions, Beliefs, Feelings, Intuitive sense, Intentions and Physiological Responses**.

My clients are not expected to perform for me and complete human contact assignments such as ordering, talking to strangers, etc. until they are personally motivated to overcome a specific fear that has become clear to them. When they come to that crossroad, they practice talking aloud, alone, or in a guided journey. They envision success with the target situation, just as athletes are trained to picture the outcome of a play. Michael Retzinger (Retz) taught me about the power of self talk, having the client talk out loud, alone.

This simple assignment leads the PWS to rediscover their natural fluency. From there, the **Belief** system can be reprogrammed, **Perceptions** begin to change, and all of the other components are primed to follow suit.

Gradually, tightly knotted strands of judgment regarding the Self, stuttering and what it means to the client start to loosen and unravel. New **Perceptions** about how stuttering is a gift from the Universe to learn about the Self start to come into focus and the primary goal to eliminate stuttering begins to wane. The new goal is to be true to the Self. This allows the client to "take their focus off of their speech" (Retz). When the unconscious mind resumes its rightful place, speech begins to flow naturally.

The clients I work with change from the inside-out, by learning about their Stuttering System. As John Harrison explained in his book, *How to Conquer Your Fears of Speaking Before People* (my bible), he disarmed his Stuttering System (the inside) long before the **Speech Behaviors** (the outside) associated with stuttering disappeared. My clients learn how to discover their natural fluency through a method of "not trying" (i.e., using unconscious mind, Trust). Instead of trying to master speaking by controlling speech and changing it, they master it by not trying to control it and not trying to change it. It's a process that my clients are learning, and I am honored to journey with them as they unravel their Stuttering Web.

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Whacking the Phone Book

by John C. Harrison

An unconventional approach for disabling speech blocks and empowering the real you

The very FIRST time I blew up in anger at someone I was 29 years old. It happened in an encounter group in San Francisco.

So how come I waited so long?

Let me explain. Fifty-five years ago, I was a nice guy with an on-again, off-again stuttering problem who managed to hide it so well that not many people ever knew that I had any fears at all about speaking. I was a guy who very much liked to blend in; you know, to be part of the group. I liked the feeling that I belonged. I wanted to be *like* other people. The speech blocks, when they happened, usually happened when I had to give my name, or ask the service station attendant to “fill it up,” or request the waitress to bring me a tuna sandwich.

But the thing that scared me the most was to look at another person and express anger toward them. Anger scared me. Fortunately, I attended a private school where the environment was very controlled and where behavior was entirely predictable. Oh, I could easily get angry about innocuous things like stubbing my toe or getting a bad grade on or missing a shot on the soccer field, but when there was a relationship with another person involved, I was always Mr. Nice Guy.

One of my enduring memories was the snowy day in December when I was walking home from school carrying my book bag and a group of kids from the public school were walking the other way on the other side of the street. When they saw the private school kid with his book bag, they all made snowballs and tossed them my way. I just kept walking and didn't even acknowledge them. I was afraid to.

“Aw, let the poor kid alone,” someone said, and they ceased the snowball barrage, much to my relief. I was angry, but even more, terrified of having anything to do with the public school crowd. It was a world in which I felt very unprotected.

The truth was, I grew up in a very protected world. My parents were nice. My sisters were nice. My friends were nice. My school environment was nice. I never had a fight. The only thing that didn't fit was that deep down, in the dark recesses of my soul, a part of my soul that never saw the light of day, I was one angry sonofabitch. And expressing that anger scared the hell out of me.

To get rid of angry or aggressive energy, you must encounter other people. And you must be vulnerable to your own feelings. My breakthrough moment came at the age of 28. I was in a room with a dozen or so people in a San Francisco warehouse owned by Synanon, an organization started by an ex-alcoholic named Chuck Deterich. Deterich started the residential organization for drug addicts and other character disorders to help them connect with their own fallibility, build up internal strength, and teach them to become responsible citizens. The centerpiece of the

organization was a free-wheeling encounter-type group that all residents were required to “play” daily. This experience was called the Synanon Game.

Ingeniously conceived, the Game was designed to manipulate people into telling the truth about themselves. The Game itself had no official leader. Rather, leadership of the Game constantly changed hands as someone would bring an indictment against one or another of the participants in the circle. It was usually for some minor infraction like leaving the lights on in the kitchen that the accuser would engross and build into a BIG DEAL. Exaggerating the behavior made it easier for the person to see and deal with it.

Supporters of Synanon like me also got to play the Game, and since we were called “squares”, our groups were called the “Square Games.”

In this particular Game, there was a fellow named Hal Fenton who was a look-alike for 1950s actor Robert Mitchum and had some notoriety for having been one of Mitchum’s stunt doubles in the movies. Being an actor, Hal loved to create drama, and this particular evening, he picked me as the focus of his attentions. I can’t remember what he indicted me for, but I took the bait. And the more he accused me, the more rebellious I got.

Finally, he pushed me over the line, and I for the first time in my life I blew up in anger at another man. I ran him up one side of the room and down the other. And throughout it all, I was totally fluent. That had never happened before.

What made it so easy for me to vent my anger at Hal? For one thing, I liked Hal, and he knew it. He was basically a nice guy, and I had really good feelings toward him. Also, the environment was conducive to people being honest with everything they felt; in fact, it was encouraged. But what makes this such a vivid memory was that for the very first time I had no impulse to hold back and block my anger toward another person (a man no less), not even a little.

Wow! The feeling was exquisite. I could express myself with the full force of my personality and experience this high decibel release when I did so.

So what does all this have to do with chronic stuttering and blocking?

If you substitute “holding back” for “stuttering,” you can readily see that in this encounter with Hal, the normal holding back that usually triggered my speech blocks was not present, not even a little bit. After the evening had ended, I went up to Hal, swatted him on the back, and thanked him for everything he’d done for me. And I didn’t even think twice about the funny look he gave me after the evening had ended.

The memory of that evening simmered in the back of my mind for many months. I had never communicated to other people with such candor and intensity, and I didn’t want to lose it. But how could I hold onto that experience, reinforce it, and recreate it at will. I couldn’t pull my friend Hal into a Game and have him get me mad every time I needed to reawaken my strong, assertive self.

A great idea

I needed a way to get in touch with my angry, aggressive side that I had suppressed for so many years. Then I had an idea. And when it occurred to me, I knew right away it was going to work. I went to my desk, opened a drawer and pulled out a copy of the San Francisco phone directory — it was pleasingly thick — and I placed it on a chair. Then I looked around the living room for a newspaper and found a copy of the *San Francisco Chronicle*. I took out the top section of paper and rolled it tightly into a baton.

I stood in front of the chair and searched my memory for a situation in my life that had gotten me angry but in which I had felt helpless to express that anger. What came up was that afternoon a dozen years before when I was pelted with snowballs by those public school kids. I pictured the kids taunting me, re-experienced the snowballs flying toward me, some hitting me and others falling all around me. My hand tightened on the rolled up newspaper. I reached my arm behind me...waited...waited... and suddenly smashed the newspaper roll into the phone book with a big...

WHACK!!!

OH MY GOD! Did that feel good! “Hey, you dumbos,” I yelled at them in my mind. “Don’t mess with me, because I’m one badass and I’m going to get you.” And just to make my point, I whacked the phone book six or seven more times, each time slowly winding up before smashing the directory.

“Hey!” my wife called from upstairs. “What’s going on down there?”

“It’s nothing,” I called back. “I’m just hammering.”

“Well, keep it down,” she called.

“I just have a few more to do,” I shouted and gave the phone book more whacks until the paper started to break apart.

“Okay, I’m done,” I called out. Later that day I explained to Doris what was going on, and thankfully, she understood.

The next day I decided to check whether letting go of my anger would have any effect on my speech. So I called up a supplier whom I normally had some trouble giving my name to. When it came time to give my name, I called up the *feelings* I had when I whacked the phone book, and my name came out without a hitch. That letting go feeling persisted for a full day before I needed to find other ways to renew it.

That was when I first began to truly understand that blocking in speech was all about holding back. I began to see that throughout my early life and throughout my early 20s, I had difficulty expressing my feelings in situations that called for me to be self-assertive. I didn’t have a stuttering problem. I had a holding back problem. I had a vulnerability problem. I had a self-expressive problem.

I don't want to leave you with the impression that my speech blocks completely went away that day. They didn't. Old habits die hard. But for the first time in my life, I had a handle on what was causing my speech blocks. I was holding back.

What I learned in the self-discovery groups in California was that my problem was not a genetic anomaly deep in my psyche. It wasn't a physical problem with my mouth or vocal cords that I had to live with. I had learned to emotionally hold back to protect myself from self-assertive interactions and situations that I didn't know how to handle. I did it by tightening those muscles which were part of my *automatic* control system. And then in those situations when I'd go to talk, *my automatic control system and my conscious control system ended up in conflict.*

Two forces of equal strength pulling in opposite directions.

The formula for creating a speech block.

People hold back in many different ways.

Whacking the phone book was just one way I used to get in touch with the real me. But there were many other ways in which I held back. For example, I was an approval junkie. I would bask in the glow of nice words from my parents and other people and would do almost anything to gain approval. I didn't like it when other people weren't pleased with me, and was always careful to not come off too strong. All this contributed to the feeling that it was dangerous to be fully me. My guess is that because the stuttering behavior appeared so early in my life, my impulse to hold back was deeply ingrained in my young psyche and quickly became "ordinary behavior"; that is, it did not stand out as anything unusual.

It was not until I stepped off the plane in San Francisco that for the first time I had the experience of being my own man. I began participating in Toastmasters, therapy groups, personal coaching, giving talks, keeping a diary, etc. Even so, change didn't happen overnight, and I had plenty of fears and challenges. I had to find things that were *fun* to do, and then make the time to do them. I had to learn to speak my own mind. I had to find out what *I* wanted to do in life, how *I* wanted to live, how *I* wanted to have fun, and then be willing to deal with the anxieties of charting my own course. It was not a linear progression. I had many ups and downs. But I never regretted for one moment waving good-bye to my parents at LaGuardia Airport on Long Island and taking off for California.

I am not saying that it is necessary to make the kind of radical move that I did. But if you want to give up chronic stuttering and blocking, you do have to ground yourself in the real you. That's because early on, holding back can easily become an unconscious habit, which is one reason why chronic stuttering and blocking can be so difficult to dissipate.

The good news is that it IS possible to beat the problem that so many people would have you believe is a hopeless cause. Speaking *can* be fun, creative, and something to look forward to.

Many PWS around the world are exploring this now.

Wouldn't you like to be one of them?

The Problem with Stuttering Therapy

by Barbara Dahm CCC-SLP; BCS-F

“I’ve tried every therapy in the book and nothing has helped.” This is the sentiment of so many people who stutter.

Numerous approaches are suggested for the treatment of stuttering. Often a person who stutters goes from place to place seeking help and is given conflicting advice that is sometimes backed by theory and often based on an intuitive hunch. This state of affairs is costly in time and money, causes frustration and adds emotional distress to people already burdened by their difficulty in speaking.

On the other hand, there are people who once stuttered and who no longer stutter. Some of these people have had therapy. Others, like USA President Joe Biden, have apparently overcome stuttering on their own.

What is the difference between these two populations? It is possible to argue that people who have stopped stuttering are just lucky that their stuttering disappeared. However, there are reasons behind all the changes, even when we can’t see or understand them.

For the past 30+ years while working as an SLP exclusively with people who stutter, I have been examining the reasons why stuttering therapy may not work as well and also why many people who stutter *do* begin to speak fluently. I would like to share with you what I have learned.

The goal of some therapies is to try to speak fluently “like everyone else.” This is problematic because typically the more people who stutter *try* to speak fluently, the more they stutter. Here we have a situation where the person in treatment is working to get the words out fluently or *trying to control speech*. Since the normal dynamic speech generating system is an *automatic* system that functions without the speaker’s conscious control, when the speaker exerts control in an attempt to speak fluently, the system becomes unstable and effortful. This in turn leads to more stuttered speech.

Thus, *as long* as the goal is simply fluency, therapy usually does not work.

There are other treatments that work on reducing the severity or frequency of blocks. These therapies usually require the individual to keep their stuttering in mind by speaking at a slow rate or with a rhythmic or monotonous pattern. *This is incongruous with the desire to speak normally*. Therefore, people who stutter usually reject using this type of controlled speech in real speaking situations because it feels *contrived*.

As long as the goal of therapy focuses on techniques that require thought and effort and that do not result in normal sounding speech, therapy usually does not work.

There are other treatment methods that help people who stutter become less sensitive to stuttering. The purpose of this treatment is to emotionally accept the difficulty in speaking while developing greater self-esteem. This is, of course, a noble goal, but for people who would like to speak naturally, *traditional* therapy has not answered the person’s needs. Furthermore, fluent speech is not a comfortable, flowing experience, at least not at first.

What is often overlooked is that the problem of stuttering goes much deeper than the stuttered speech. Research into brain functioning has shown that people who stutter use *different brain processes* to

produce speech than do people who speak fluently (Braun, 1997; Finitzo, Pool, Freeman, Devous, & Watson, 1991; Ingham, Fox, & Ingham, 1997). The reason why the brain functions differently for some people when producing speech is not yet known. However, these findings suggest that there is a connection between the brain processes and the speech produced. Therefore, training the brain to produce speech in the same way used by fluent speakers will enhance the ability to speak fluently.

I have seen people who stutter change the way they generate speech. The processes are not hard-wired. New processing behavior can be developed. While some people require guidance to make this happen, others succeed in doing this without formal treatment. The result is normal sounding speech that is more automatic and easier to produce than stuttered speech.

Understanding how speech is processed by normally fluent speakers and by people who stutter leads to well defined treatment goals that work. There is a definite cause and effect relationship between the brain processes that are developed and the resulting speech fluency. When the normal process is achieved, the result is fluent speech that sounds normal (Dahm & Kaplan, 2000). The rate of speaking is normal and patterns of intonation are flexible and normal.

This sounds ideal. However, there is a very large obstacle that people who stutter encounter that can prevent them from using a relatively simple process. The obstacle is the challenge of making *genuine* change.

Part of human nature is to resist change. People who stutter usually want their speech to become fluent. But they may not be mentally and emotionally prepared to make the far-reaching changes that affect their impulse to hold back which is the major factor that triggers the problem.

To make real change, you need to be prepared to give up control, to hear the sound of your natural voice, to focus on your ideas without paying attention to the words that express these ideas, and to speak clearly. Very often people struggle not to change, because change is viewed as “putting on an act”.

In truth, we are all changing for better or worse all the time. Change is part of the dynamic of living. But many people who are used to stuttering have difficulty accepting how they sound when speaking normally. They may resist sounding assertive. Or they may be driven by an impulse toward perfectionism. In addition, on a neurophysiologic level, their brain may resist changing the default program that they have established for speaking.

Establishing a new default brain circuitry for speaking requires awareness, initiative, and determination. Equally important is the need to build a new way of producing speech and planting the seeds of change. Although no therapy can work on its own, when the people who stutter bring about and accept those changes that are necessary, they are able to use their dynamic speech generating system effectively to produce a successful and rewarding therapeutic experience.

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A Trip on LSD and What I Learned About Chronic Stuttering

by John C. Harrison

Some years ago I read a unique book by the noted British writer Aldus Huxley. The book, *Between Heaven and Hell* describes his trip on the psychedelic drug mescaline that took place over the course of an afternoon in May 1953. The book gets its title from a phrase in William Blake's 1793 poem *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*.

In the book Huxley recalls the insights he experienced, which ranged from the "purely aesthetic" to "sacramental vision. He also incorporates later reflections on the experience and its meaning for art and religion.

I read the book at a time when I was trying to figure out what my life was all about. In that regard I was in good company. In California in the 1960s and 1970s thousands of young people were trying out new lifestyles and experiences. I was too "square" to be part of the hippy generation. But I was nevertheless interested in exploring the forces that drove my life. So when a friend of mine told me she could get me a potent dose of LSD, I jumped at the chance.

I also had another agenda. For most of my early life, I had suffered with a very moderate stuttering problem that took the form of a silent block. Although by age 37 I had worked through pretty much all of the difficulties with my speech, I still had a lot of questions about the source and the dynamics that drove my occasional speech blocks. So I decided to step into the unknown to see what I could see.

The following is an account of what happened the day I took LSD and some of the things I learned about myself and about why I thought and felt the way I did.

A trip on LSD

It was nothing like I expected. I had been thinking of a million things that I wanted to deal with on the trip, and I had great visions of going out of control, actually wanting to go out of control. I had a dozen accounts of other people's trips in the back of my mind, and I had the thought that I was as well prepared as anyone could be for an experience like this. Later, I was to discover that I was probably too prepared. It is better to enter the experience without preconceptions and let happen what happens. But more on this later.

For all my prior readings, however, I really didn't know what to expect. Last Tuesday Mary Lynn (my guide and friend from a therapy group we both attended) asked me how I would like her to be. I gave her a brief profile – accepting, benevolent. And I told her a little more about my past, some odds and ends that I thought might be useful. As it turned out, this wasn't necessary, either. Because my trip, baby, was a very personal trip, indeed.

I'm going to tell it the way it happened. And the title of this narrative is...

Let it be.

It is Sunday morning, and I wake up aware of my anticipation and excitement. I have thought about LSD for five years; speculated, wondered, read about it, imagined my own reactions, and listened a little

jealously to others who'd gone through into some strange beyond. What will happen to me? Will I go bananas? Will I be carted off to the looney bin. What does acid do to your mind? I don't really know, all my reading notwithstanding. It's a little like the day I made my first parachute jump, but not really that scary. I have a quiet confidence that I can come through the experience okay, no matter what happens. I feel strong. I sense that I am flexible enough to go with whatever comes up. And unlike leaping into space, I feel that there's less personal danger, and more control over what will happen. Still....

Mary Lynn calls at 9 a.m. to say she'll be over in twenty minutes. I get up, shower, and walk Michou. I don't eat any breakfast, however, because food slows up the time in which the drug starts working its magic.

Finally, the doorbell rings. Mary Lynn comes upstairs, troops into the kitchen to make some coffee and settles down to read the paper while I poke around in the back room for a post card my mother wrote to me when I was five years old at summer camp. I wanted to see how I would feel about the letter and my mother while under the sway of LSD. But I can't find the thing, though I poke through three boxes of belongings. Damn post card. You can never find anything when you look for it. Of course, there are about 500 letters in those boxes, but I knew I had it there somewhere. Oh, what the hell. I'm disappointed, but I'll have to get along without it. Maybe it's just as well.

I walk into the living room and sit down at the table, a little sweaty from the work. The envelope with the LSD is on the table. Mary Lynn had shown me the acid before, on Tuesday, when she brought it over. This brand comes as a tiny transparent square, about the size of a small integrated circuit, so small that you'd never find it if it fell on the carpet. As it is, I open the paper carefully, and the LSD chip falls out one end.

"How do I take it?" I ask Mary Lynn.

"Dennis puts it on his tongue and then drinks something. You could put in a glass of water, but it might not all dissolve properly."

Okay, then. I carefully drop the tiny transparent square on my tongue, and drink down the glass of orange juice I'd poured moments ago.

The process has started. There's no going back.

We talk for a while. I have this feeling that it's not going to work. I worry about whether the acid chip actually dissolved in my mouth and go in to pour another glass of orange juice. I don't want to take any chances. The feeling of its not working still lingers. The feeling is that everyone has interesting experiences except me. Not true, I know, but somehow the nature of this experience is that it's forbidden. All my life, I never felt that I could experience the forbidden.

We move into the living room. I sit in the leather chair and Mary Lynn brings up the wicker chair and shares the footstool with me. We talk for a little bit. I keep waiting for something to happen, but nothing does. The feeling that it won't work continues to plague me.

The phone rings, and I go into the bedroom to answer it. It's my friend Marty. He wants to ask me about 35 mm cameras. He's thinking of buying a Konica and wants to know my opinion of it. I tell him it's a good camera, one of the respected brands on the market. He likes the camera because it can either be completely automatic, or you can manually override the automatic operation and adjust the meter and

lens opening yourself. I agree that for what he wants to use it for, the feature is a good one. All the while I'm talking, I hope he finishes soon because I'm afraid that all of a sudden I'll fall under the influence of the drug and will trip out on him. Marty keeps talking, and trying to be as polite as possible, I subtly attempt to end the conversation. Finally, we run out of things to say. I tell him about cameras from Hong Kong, and that I'll bring a catalog on Monday. He says great, and we make our good-byes. I hang up and walk into the next room, and sit back down in the leather chair.

Something begins to happen. I feel heady. It's working.

I am into the trip and my head is producing sensations. I begin to experience a strange phenomenon – that what I'm experiencing is not really happening to *me*. It is Mary Lynn's trip. Or someone else's trip. But not mine. I say over and over: "This is MY trip. This is MY trip. Goddamit, Mary Lynn, this is MY trip. Not your trip. MY trip." This is hard to put into words, but I have the impression that I have to claim the experience for my own. It is the impression that I'm undergoing another person's experience. I know I'm not. Yet, I'm having a hard time claiming ownership. I am not having a vicarious experience. It is truly MY trip. But I feel I'm not supposed to be having it.

Eventually, I begin to feel more comfortable with the ownership of the trip. It is mine.

Then I get into another problem.

I have read so much about what an LSD trip *should* be that I'm having trouble just allowing myself to experience the sensations. I see so clearly how powerfully expectations can color my perceptions. It doesn't make any difference if it's other people's expectations for what you should be...or your own expectations about an experience. Either kind of expectation gets in the way. I find myself saying something new: "*Let it be!*"

Over and over again I say, "Let it be. Let it be. Dammit, John, let it BE."

Now I understand what the Beatles were singing about back in the '60s.

I find that the only way I can remove myself from the expectations is to close my eyes. I lie down on the carpet and get off on the visual trip. Psychedelic patterns are moving in my mind; intricate colors and designs with serrated edges. I ask Mary Lynn to bring me the roses that are sitting in water in the silver cocktail shaker. I got the roses the night before from Donna Sheehan. They came from her garden and were not particularly beautiful roses, but I wanted them anyway, because in every account I'd read by those who had taken LSD, people had a transcendental experience when they embraced a rose. Mary Lynn is about to bring the roses over...and then I stop her.

"Wait a minute," I say. "I don't know how those roses will look. I have all these expectations about the roses and how under acid *you* become the rose. But I only know how the roses *should* look."

At this moment I am lying on the carpet in the middle of my living room. We're in the top floor of an old Victorian home on California Street in San Francisco. The living room is huge – 30 by 50 feet – with a center section that reaches up 17 feet with windows on all four sides and light pouring down on us.

"Hold off on the roses for now," I say.

Mary Lynn holds off on the roses. She puts on more records. The music plays, and my mind really begins to soar. Soon I say, "Okay, now you can bring me the roses." She hands them to me. I open my eyes and look at the roses. I'm shocked. They look very mundane and uninteresting. Not at all what I expected. In fact, during the whole trip the roses never amount to much.

I'm really becoming aware of how my expectations are able to color my perceptions. Not only am I not seeing things that are there, I'm also seeing things that aren't there. Just like my expectations color my perceptions, they also lead me to want to describe things that I am *not* seeing; for example, aspects about the roses that are *not* true, just because I had read about what the roses *should* look like. I discover that I have to make an effort to keep myself honest. I have to be so careful I don't say things I *should* be saying. I just have never realized the degree to which I am affected by my expectations. It is shocking how easily they can be influenced by internal pressures.

I have another visual hallucination. When I look up, it seems that there are hundreds of strings hanging from the ceiling. Each of those strings is another expectation of how the roses *should* look. *One* of those strings is the real experience. How can I tell which of those strings are the real experience? The problem is -- I can't.

Grapes are another matter. I am lying on the floor with my eyes closed. Mary Lynn passes something cold over my face. It feels big. It's half a grape. She then gives me a bunch of grapes. I bury my nose in them and pass my lips over the individual grapes. It reminds me of sucking on a nipple. With my eyes still closed, I pluck a grape and eat it slowly. Now I know what they mean when they talk about "being" the thing you're in contact with. I couldn't "be" the rose, but I "am" the grape. The sensations, the smell, the taste, the feel of the grape overpower me. They simply pre-empt my senses. Everything is grapes. The room is grapes. Mary Lynn is grapes. My body is grapes. My life is grapes.

I am conscious of nothing else but the grapeness of existence.

While this is going on, selections from the sound track to "2001: A Space Odyssey" are playing on the phonograph. Then they end, and I ask Mary Lynn to play it again.

"Don't you want to hear something else?" she asks.

"No," I say. "You can play the same thing. I'll just listen to it to a different grape."

We both crack up, because there is great truth in that remark.

Several times after that I try to milk the grape joke, but it is not funny again. I am aware of how I am trying to get Mary Lynn to respond, to laugh, rather than just be myself. So much is happening that I don't have to contrive jokes for laughs, but the urge is there anyway.

I am now into the most intense part of the trip. The music from "2001: A Space Odyssey" is still playing, and I have reached a peak of ecstasy that I'd never ever attained before. I am lying on the floor with my head in my hands. In my mind I'm seeing a shape that resembles an octopus, and it's acting like a communications network. Dashes of information are strobing up its arms and into the body, the animation resembling moving lights on a Broadway theater marquee. I wonder whether the octopus also represents a possessiveness, but it does not feel threatening that way. I am saying to Mary Lynn over and over again, "It is incredible. It is absolutely *incredible*. Oh. Oh. Oh. *It is in-CREDIBLE.*" I feel like the actor

Jack Nicholson in a movie, smack in the middle of an orgy scene. I am at a pinnacle of ecstasy beyond which I don't think it's possible to go.

And I am living with it. I have an image of myself as a sensualist. I like the sounds that I'm making. I sound sensual and worldly. Hey, that's me. The good stuff *does* come to me, too. I feel like I have gotten past the earlier hang-up of fighting for this to be my trip. I am letting go. It *is* my trip. And I am digging it. God, am I.

(Three days after, I am thinking about this trip, and I realize how all the significant things happened while my eyes were closed. I think that maybe the visual world was giving me too much trouble, so I blocked it out, and then I got to the far out ecstatic places. I wonder whether this is not an accurate reflection of my life in general. I have always been a fantasizer. Dealing with the real world was always harder than creating my own.)

Lying on the floor looking up at the ceiling, I see the shingles become fluid and see them spread and flow into one another. Wow! That is the most hallucinogenic I've become with the world outside myself. I look at Mary Lynn's face, and I can see little gold flecks in it. I am aware of her moles, but I don't continue to focus on them. Then just for a second, I see a blue duotone overlaying her face. It moves "out of register" and then "in register." It is interesting.

I am lying on the floor and Mary Lynn is sitting next to me. She seems young, but I feel like I've the body of a 60-year-old man. I do not feel desirable. Eventually this sensation passes. Mary Lynn tickles me and squeezes an orange into my mouth. But I don't like the orange. It feels like I might choke on the juice, so she stops.

Mary Lynn expresses an interest in going out for a while. At first, I don't want to, but then I think maybe it's about time. We go downstairs and stop for a minute in front of the outside door. I don't know what the world will be like out there, and I am a little bit anxious. But I must be coming down from the high, because I don't feel out of touch – just high like a good marijuana high. We go outside. It's warm and sunny. I stop and talk with Mary Lynn for a minute or so in the back yard. As we walk down the first set of outside stairs, I see the Japanese gardener. We stop for a moment, and the gardener brings his sack and tools and passes by us. I have the distinct impression that I'm a spy at the Bay of Tokyo, and a Japanese heavy cruiser has just sailed by. We laugh about it.

Walking down the front stairs, Mary Lynn says that nobody can tell that I'm high. I'm relieved. I'm aware of the need to look relaxed and in control. We walk past the firehouse, and I'm aware that this is a potential danger area. I'm afraid of a fireman saying something, but no one is there. Just beyond the firehouse we stop and look at the flowers. They don't look particularly different, and in a way I'm disappointed. I'm almost down from the LSD experience.

Mary Lynn suggests we go to a little shop on Sacramento near Fillmore for bagels. It sounds good to me. We're walking at an easy pace, and the air feels sensual and warm. We get to the shop and walk in. It is a hippy-type place, and I immediately like the vibes. Several girls are sitting there, but the shop is officially closed. So we walk around to Fillmore and enter another shop that serves bagels. I am trying to look cool. We order bagels and cream cheese and sit on stools in the corner. Mary Lynn brings the food over and then goes back for coffee. I sit there wondering whether anyone there is questioning why I'm not taking care of the food instead of Mary Lynn. But I don't trust myself to move. We sit and eat, and I'm busy talking about some of the things I've discovered so far – about it being my trip and about

how hard it was for me initially to let go and just let it be. And then what happened when I finally did. I feel very insulated in this corner.

Eventually, we get up and leave. We walk toward Broadway, and at first, I want to head back to the apartment, but I realize there's no real need to do this. We turn right and walk up Washington. I am aware that I want to experience more intense things, but then I make another observation. And that is – I have to look at something for a while to get involved with it before anything visually interesting happens. It dramatizes the fact that you can walk through life without ever getting involved...by never focusing on anything long enough to engage your feelings. In a sense, that's what we are doing walking down the street together. But also, I am coming down from the high.

We end up lying on the grass in the park. By this time my mind is trying to put some of it together. I talk a lot. Then it gets chilly, so we go back to the apartment, where I talk some more. Eventually I take Mary Lynn out to dinner, to the Spinning Works not too far from where she lives on 26th Street. It is a good dinner especially the tomato soup, which I taste profoundly. Finally we leave there. I drop Mary Lynn off at her place about 10:30 and go home.

Soon after, I am lying in bed, still awake but aware that I'm also tired on some level. My mind still wants to go. I think of taking a shower, but cancel the idea.

Finally, I sleep.

What my LSD experience taught me about chronic stuttering

I went through this LSD experience a good five years before I joined the National Stuttering Project (now the National Stuttering Association) and a good 13 years before I came up with the concept of the Stuttering Hexagon. By 1972, my stuttering was pretty much resolved. Occasionally, I would find myself blocking for a moment. But it no longer threw me into panic, and I could pull myself out of a block without undue effort.

What the LSD experience allowed me to do was to define in sharper contrast and detail how the stuttering system worked and the ways in which my emotions, perceptions, beliefs, and intentions, interacted with my genetic make-up and habits of speech to create a self-supporting holding back and blocking system. I kind of knew what those elements were beforehand, but the LSD allowed these tendencies and characteristics to manifest in an exaggerated way that I could strongly experience and better understand.

For example, when I first started to feel the effects of LSD, my experience was that all this was happening to someone else. That was because I was not used to experiencing or expressing strong emotions. The experience really convinced me that what I was seeing was an accurate portrayal of the way I habitually functioned. I can remember in fifth grade giving the most popular girl in my class a special gift while simultaneously making an effort to reveal *nothing* of what I was feeling for her. I was similarly excited by various other girls, and yet, when slow dancing cheek to cheek with them at class parties, I could never offer any clues to how exciting it felt. Showing emotion made me vulnerable.

I also never showed my assertiveness, never had a fight, never expressed my anger if it was directed at another person. Strong emotions were a total mystery, but my hidden, unexpressed feelings had a controlling effect on what I was willing to say and do. That was especially true when I had to recite in front of the class. That's when my blocking was at its worst.

And what did I substitute for strong emotions?

Approval. I had to gain other people's approval. And if their approval was really REALLY important...that's when I held back.

Fortunately, I went to a small private school so I never had to fend for myself in the schoolyard and playground of a large public school. I often wonder how I would have fared in such an environment and whether I would have been picked on by other, stronger students.

In 1957 I graduated from university and served in the army reserves for six months. After leaving active service, I held a few minor jobs in New York City. Then in 1961 at age 26, feeling lost and undirected, I left my father's advertising business and "ran away from home" to San Francisco to see if I could find myself.

I found a job as an advertising copywriter with the small local office of a national ad agency. One thing I noticed after living on the west coast for a few months: because I'd left the safety of a familiar environment, I found myself more willing to take chances as I pushed outside my comfort zone on a number of different fronts. Among other things I did in San Francisco was to become a community sponsor of a new, free-wheeling organization called Synanon. The mission of Synanon was to rehabilitate drug addicts and other character disorders. To this end, they pioneered various unconventional activities, notably the Synanon Game, which was a controlled free-for-all in which participants were challenged to speak and act honestly. In the early 60s Synanon opened up the games to community sponsors like me (they referred to us as "squares"), and I spent two years "playing" the Square Games and learning a lot about who I was as a person.

For example, it wasn't until I was in one of those games at the age of 29 that I ever blew up at another human being. That was a long time coming, baby. And boy, did it feel good. A by-product of these activities was that I continued to hold back less and less, and as a result, my stuttering and blocking continued to diminish.

I also became active in Toastmasters. And then in the late 1970s I joined a fledgling organization called the National Stuttering Project, the forerunner of today's National Stuttering Association in the U.S. Thanks to the NSP I had an opportunity to travel around the country and run workshops for NSP chapters on public speaking and on understanding the stuttering system. Eventually I started doing workshops abroad for stuttering organizations in eight countries on three continents. And in the late 1990s, I also started running public speaking workshops for the general public in San Francisco which I continued to do for over a dozen years.

If there's one thing I've learned about chronic stuttering and blocking, it's that it's far more than just a speech problem. It is, in fact, a holding back system that involves all of you. I didn't need LSD to move forward in my fight to overcome chronic stuttering and blocking. But having that experience did facilitate my understanding of what stuttering and blocking were *really* all about.

And it did validate what I was discovering about myself, my life, and my ability to express myself.

STUTTERING BECAME MY BIGGEST BLESSING

by Lee Lovett

I ran into Lee Lovett, the developer of Stuttering and Anxiety Self-Cures, several years ago and found what he was doing markedly different from any other program I had seen for people who stutter. Lee is a very unique individual. A trained attorney, he's started and run a number of businesses. He's also written half a dozen books on various subjects including stuttering. And he's developed a unique approach for disabling the stuttering syndrome that is different from anything I've ever seen.

Lee is a great observer and a real doer. Like all of us, he grew up with a stuttering problem, but unlike many others, he didn't allow his speech difficulties to hold him back. And over time, he completely resolved his stuttering problem by developing his own unique methodology.

The following two pieces will give you a good feeling for Lee's unusual approach to resolving stuttering and blocking behaviors. In the first piece, Lee describes the thinking, philosophy and methodology behind his program. The second piece is written by Prathusha Ravi, one of his experienced coaches, who went through the program and who is now actively coaching other PWS in Lee's methodology. -J.H

My name is Lee Lovett. I am not a doctor, but I consider myself an expert of sorts on stuttering, because I battled it for some 25 years, during my teens, 20s and 30s. I have read countless books on the subject and I wrote four editions of a book about the methods that I use to control it and two other stuttering-related books. In addition, in the past five years, I have coached PWS over 5,000 sessions for free and have helped a couple hundred of them stop stuttering, 150 of whom posted "Success Stories" on my speech website (speechanxietyanonymous.org). As this video will demonstrate, stuttering forced me to become a better person.

I am a long-retired attorney who co-founded dozens of still operating businesses, and I recently wrote four books. I also did a website for my family and for those interested, you can find it at **leeglovett.com**

For reasons still unknown to me, I began stuttering badly in early puberty and the problem grew progressively worse. By my mid-20s, I had a wife, two sons, and I was flat broke. I had just graduated from law school. When trying my first case in court I was unable to say my own name or my clients name and many other words. The judge intervened and finished my words and sentences. It was ghastly. I wanted to die right on the spot, literally!

I knew that, absent immediate improvement of my stuttering, my nascent legal career was all but over. In the 1960s there were few (if any) books, clinics, therapists, associations and certainly no internet to help stutterers. So, I scraped together enough money to pay for six sessions with a psychiatrist, Dr. Frank S. Caprio, a well-known author. I wanted Dr. Caprio to hypnotize me and tell me I did not stutter. I thought that would cure me. He said that it might cure me for a month, a week, a day, or an hour, but that it would *not* cure me permanently. In fact, he was not sure that there was a cure, a permanent one for stuttering, but he felt that I could improve my stuttering dramatically, and he recommended that I try self-hypnosis.

He explained that it was nothing more than a deepened state of relaxation and had no risks. He gave me a short paperback book on the subject captioned, "A Practical Guide to Self-Hypnosis" by Melvin Powers. Its most essential techniques were not hard to learn, and I began giving myself daily self-hypnosis treatments. One before going to sleep, one before rising and one during the day. I found that I really did not need to be hypnotized as such - simply being deeply relaxed seemed to do the job. When relaxed I would visualize and hear myself speaking fluently, and the more that I maintained those images in my mind, the less that I stuttered. Self-hypnosis gave me fluency-visualization on steroids.

Self-hypnosis also led me to Auto Suggestion - a much easier discipline for mind control that could be done in smaller bites, such as five minutes here and there.

Auto suggestion was popularized by Émile Coué, a late 1800s pharmacist turned psychologist, who wrote a series of books on the subject and is said to have healed hundreds. Coué preached three things: relaxation, visualization, and repetition of the thoughts that you wish to have. Modern psychiatrists seem to follow his lead.

I would say things when deeply relaxed such as: "I love to speak," "When I speak, calm floods my body," "I focus on my message, not on the words." "I can see and hear myself speaking fluently." I repeated such statements at least 20 times each per mind-treatment, and, over time, my mind became full of positive memories of fluency, and my stuttering gradually declined.

By trial and error, I also discovered methods or strategies (which I call "crutches"), which enabled me to leapfrog over most feared words. These crutches helped me avoid creating new memories of stuttering. Those crutches are detailed in my book which I have given to many stutterers. My crutches combined with my multiple daily mind training treatments enabled me to stutter less and less until my stuttering became undetectable as it has been for the past forty years.

Yes, for some years, I had stuttering fears but not every hour or minute as I once did. And for decades now, only my wife has been able to catch me in a rare stutter. Stuttering first threatened my life, but, then, it saved my life and made me a better person.

Fighting stuttering forced me to learn mind-training methods that helped me control my mind, my attitudes, my thoughts, my words, my actions, my Karma, and my level of peace and joy. To this day and every day of my life, I still give myself what I call mind-treatments, and I use a crutch now and then to avoid a stutter. But my life is a hundred times better now than it was before I began stuttering.

In 2020, a great thing happened. Some of my ex-stuttering students helped create what is now *the world's only community of EX-stutterers* to help stutterers, and they built an entire program around my methods. You can find it at speechanxiety.com (SAC). If you want to beat it, or to just hang out with people who have beaten it, go to SAC. Although I don't own or manage it or get paid by it, you'll find me there, too, because it is doing what I can't: Spread my methods far and wide. SAC has the same goal that I do: Kick stuttering off the planet.

I can honestly say that I'm grateful that I had to battle stuttering. I wrote all of this in detail in my book "Stuttering and Anxiety Self-Cures", and I encourage readers to email me at info@leeglovet.com.

Anyway, I'm long retired now but I still coach, no charge, with as many readers as my time allows and so far, I haven't turned anyone down. In closing I can assure you of one thing: Life is good or bad because that's the way we choose to **see** it. Stuttering is a beast to be sure, but you and nearly all PWS can beat it, and we can use it to become better people and to live happier lives, and that's what I want for you. I leave you with the words of Dr. Frank S Caprio:

“We have free choice
to accept or reject our thoughts.
Nothing compels us to think anything,
except our own desires.

Use your mental switch
to dictate your thoughts.
Believe that you can improve,
and you will.”

In all events, I wish you the same fluency that has elevated my life many fold.

My Recovery

by Prathusha Ravi, India

Hello everybody!! I stopped stuttering over four years ago now, and I become more fluent every year!

I'm Prathusha Ravi, age 25, I used to stutter pitifully, but I became a PWSS (a person who stopped stuttering) and, later, a certified speech coach (CSC) at Speech Anxiety Cures, the world's only community of EX-stutterers.

I'm a south Indian, born and raised in Chennai which is also known as the medical capital of India. I'm bilingual. I can speak Tamil which is one of the regional languages in India, and of course I can speak English.

During my childhood, I was this naughty kid who always gets into trouble and gets my mother embarrassed, so my mom was always worried about me. After my dad passed away there were many more things to worry about, and that's exactly the same time in which I developed a stutter.

My mother was devastated, and she felt helpless. She took me to speech therapy where they asked me to read aloud every day and also asked me to do some breathing exercise. To my surprise they even asked me to put pebbles in my mouth and speak, and it really felt weird. Nothing seemed to work. One day at school, my class teacher asked me to read a paragraph from the book in front of the class, and that's when I realized that I was not even able to say one word. I was blocking and stuttering on almost every word I said. That was a nightmare, and I couldn't come to terms with it.

As I grew, my stutter only got worse. I couldn't talk to strangers, especially men. I couldn't even bring myself to look at them as I was so embarrassed about my stutter. And more than that, I was so scared about what the man might think of me. This was definitely not attractive, and that's when I thought my life was over.

In 2017, I joined a support group in Facebook to feel accepted. That's when something amazing happened, I stumbled upon the name Lee Lovett, and I also saw that this person has written a book. So, I emailed Lee and explained my stuttering problem and asked if he could help me out. I never in my dreams thought that he would reply but HE DID. He also scheduled a Skype session soon after. That was the best day of my life, and that's when I realized that miracles do happen.

Coach Lee was very cordial and empathetic! The interesting part was that he's been through the stuttering problem himself. (Who else can I learn from?) He told me his speech journey and how he became a person who stopped stuttering (PWSS). He also explained the importance of mind training and also explained the mechanics of the crutches. I was so inspired and truly believed that his methods would definitely work. All this while I was taken to a speech therapist who had studied about stuttering on pen and paper, but I don't believe really knew how it feels to stutter.

After my first session with Lee, I felt so confident and could see the light at the end of the tunnel. I was able to use his Crutches (for example, skipping the first letter or syllable of the next feared word), and presto: No stuttering. My stutter disappeared so fast that it shocked me!

Lee assigned “homework”. For me, this included reading aloud daily, doing several 20-minute sessions of auto suggestions (or talking to yourself positively, which he explains in great detail in his book, and even better in the 3rd Edition), and practicing using his 13 Crutches.

When I did that daily, my speech seemed fine. I disciplined myself to use the 1,2,3 punch (1-reading aloud, 2- ASTs x2 daily, and using crutches every day, even when I didn’t need one. I was also a good speech cop (i.e: never allowing myself to stutter.) This prevented me from creating dysfluent memories, a vital factor in becoming a PWSS. It took me a week or so to understand the mechanics of crutches. And it took 3-4 weeks to learn the crutches correctly. But I was so relieved that I could do it.

Soon after that I became a PWSS. I started practicing the crutches in front of strangers. Despite having fears and threats I kept using the crutches, and I realized that my fear was becoming lesser and lesser with each fluent memory.

Between 2016 and 2018 I was working for a renowned IT firm, and at one of the town halls I was able to host an event. I was right up there on the stage with a mike in hand and I was speaking in front of 500+ people.

Was I nervous? Of course, I was nervous, but I kept telling myself that I’m not nervous but excited.

This small change in perspective made a huge difference. I would say that it was truly a success of my sincere mind training regimen wherein I was able to reaffirm my positivity by saying I’m excited in spite of feeling nervous. I spoke beautifully with so much confidence and my colleagues gave me a standing ovation at the event.

I never forget to celebrate these moments. And now that I’m a certified speech coach, I’m able to stay sharp in using the crutches. During the coaching sessions I also learn from teaching my students and get to practice the crutches along with my students.

It is so amazing what SAC does! I mean it is a complete package where one enters as a PWS and leaves as a PWSS who sees stuttering as a blessing! And unlike other stuttering support groups, this is the only community in the world comprised of ex-stutterers and those fast becoming ex-stutterers. It offers blogs, forums, a speech club, and sends tips in regular emails. And it has a pool of 1000+ coaching videos that a PWS can learn from.

SAC also has a separate section for parents of the child who stutters where the parent can learn and understand their children’s stuttering problem. And they can also take up the course to guide their children and understand the do’s and don’ts which are essential to achieving the child’s fluency.

Maybe best of all, SAC offers PWS a place to hang out and socialize with ex-stutterers and other PWS who are in the process of becoming ex-stutterers. I’m so glad and honored to be a part of SAC as it truly is a breakthrough in the stuttering world. You can join SAC today at www.speechanxiety.com

Listen to my success story at: <https://vimeo.com/513421194/5cddc08092>.

Understanding a Speech Block

by John C. Harrison

At the heart of chronic stuttering -- specifically, the kind of dysfluency that ties you up so you momentarily cannot utter a word -- is something called a "speech block." We have traditionally seen speech blocks as having a life of their own, mysterious and unexplainable. Speech blocks seem to "strike" us at odd moments, usually without our knowing why.

You're standing in line at MacDonalds, about to say "hamburger," when suddenly, a speech block zooms out of the ether and (WHUMP!) hits you in the vocal cords and renders you speechless. The blocks seem as if they are not connected to us, giving rise to such phrases as "I was hit by a speech block."

In response, we search for explanations. You hear statements such as, "Speech blocks are genetic." -- a prime example of using one unknown to explain another. But when you understand what a block is about, it begins to make sense. There is no need to resort to such esoterica as genetics. Sometimes, simple explanations are the most compelling.

Opposing forces

I'd like to invite you to undertake a little exercise. Hook your hands together with your elbows pointed outward in opposite directions. Now try and pull your hands apart while making sure that your hands stay locked.

This is an example of a block. You have two forces of equal strength pulling in opposite directions -- the force you're exerting to pull your hands apart opposes the force you're exerting to keep your hands locked together. As long as the two forces are equally balanced, you remain blocked.

If you want to get past the block, what are your options? Well, you can.

1. decide to stop trying to pull your hands apart;
2. decide to stop clamping your hands together;
3. decide that this silly demonstration is not worth wasting another moment of
4. your time and go do something else.

Any of these alternatives will instantly resolve the block.

Let's look at what these three options have in common. All of them involve your intentions -- in this case, your conflicting intentions. The block is caused by attempting to do two things simultaneously that pull you in diametrically opposite directions -- pull your hands apart and hold them together.

How does this relate to speech?

A speech block is created when you intend to do two things that are directly opposed to one another. As long as you keep trying to do them both, you will experience yourself as blocked.

Shooting the horseTo better understand the nature of a block, let us examine it within a totally different context. Let us say that one beautiful summer afternoon you're riding your favorite horse in the back country. Your mount is a splendid Arabian that you've raised from a colt. Riding this gallant steed has become your most beloved pastime, and over 15 years the two of you have become fast friends. When you're not riding, you're in the stable, grooming the horse and caring for it.

Today, as you canter through the tall grass, you're lost in a magical, timeless world. Then suddenly, disaster! Your world collapses! The horse steps into a hidden hole, crashes to the ground and hurls you over its head. You roll. You pick yourself up, knees and elbows raw. But you're oblivious to the pain, because the unthinkable has happened. Your best friend, the Arabian that you've loved for 15 years, is lying on the ground with its leg broken. It is in pain. It is suffering. It cannot be saved. You know that the only humane thing is to put it out of its misery. Right here. Right now.

Because this is snake country, you have gotten in the habit of wearing a side arm. You have one with you now, a .38 colt. You draw the pistol, and walk slowly up to the horse. You can see its pain. This has to be done. You stretch your arm in front of you, hand gripping the .38. You aim the pistol at the horse's forehead, and slowly squeeze the trigger.

But your finger freezes. The horse is looking straight into your eyes. You look back. This is your best friend. How can you possibly pull the trigger? You think of all the years you've spent together, all the happy hours in the back country. *How can you just stand there and kill your best friend?*

You try again, but once more, you cannot get yourself to pull the trigger. Your index finger is rigid and won't move. You're aware of what's holding you back. You are not willing to experience the grief you know will arise the second after you pull the trigger, the pistol lurches in your hand, and the horse's eyes glaze over. *You just cannot pull the trigger!* At this moment you are experiencing a block. Two forces of equal strength are pulling you in opposite directions. Pull the trigger and lose your best friend. Don't pull the trigger, and cause your best friend to suffer needlessly.

You find yourself frozen.

How can you get past the block?

You can choose not to pull the trigger and allow the horse to suffer, or perhaps have someone come and do the job for you. Another option is to pull the trigger and accept the pain you're sure to feel. Whichever route you take, to get past the block, something has to give.

Losing self-awareness

Were you in this position, there would be no mystery about what was going on. You'd know why you couldn't pull the trigger. You loved the horse, and the pain of shooting it was something you could not bear.

Now let's modify this story. Let us say that *you were out of touch with the fact that you cared for the horse*, because you traditionally hid your feelings from yourself. You were just not the type to admit that you cared.

Okay, same scenario. The horse falls and breaks its leg. You draw your pistol and point it at the horse. You start to squeeze the trigger, and again, your finger freezes. But now, the frozen finger is a mystery, because you are out of touch with your feelings. You do not allow yourself to *know* that you care for the horse, although you care terribly. You have pushed this caring out of your awareness.

Nevertheless, the fear of having to confront those feelings is holding you captive. Some *thing* is stopping you from pulling that trigger. It seems beyond your control because you're out of touch with your fears about shooting the horse. It's a matter of will. What is stopping you is your own reluctance to act.

The speech block This is analogous to what happens with a speech block. You have a divided intention -- speak/don't speak. But because you have learned to prevent yourself from experiencing painful emotions, you close up and hold back. You push the fear (embarrassment, discomfort, etc.) out of your conscious awareness.

Thus, the block seems outside of your control, because you're only aware of half the conflict. You know you want to speak, but you are not aware of the simultaneous reluctance to speak because of the underlying fear and pain. You hold yourself back without being aware you're doing so. That is why speech blocks seem to happen *to* you.

The antidote is to begin paying attention to what you're feeling...or at least start noticing and questioning what's going on when you block. The most compelling question I used to ask myself when I was afraid of blocking was, "Suppose I do speak right now in this situation. *What might I experience?*"

Usually, the first thing I thought of was, "I might stutter." Perhaps. "But what *else*, might I experience?" Here's where so many people go blank. They simply don't know what else might be lurking down there.

Is it a fear of asserting yourself...of looking aggressive or coming on too strong...of being the real *you*? Usually, the problem lies in this area. There is something about yourself that you feel is unacceptable, so you hold back until it feels safe to talk. "Safe" means that you can now talk because the intensity of the feelings has dropped and you can now remain within your comfort zone.

A second scenario

Just to confuse things, there is another, completely different scenario that can also lead to a speech block. It, too, involves a divided intention, but it is driven by different forces. It has to do with one of the body's natural responses -- the valsalva reflex.

William Parry in his excellent book, [*Understanding and Controlling Stuttering*](#) (available from the National Stuttering Association or from Amazon) postulates that a speech block can result from the misapplication of a valsalva maneuver.

What is a valsalva maneuver? A valsalva maneuver is what your body does whenever you try to lift a heavy suitcase, open a stuck window, give birth, take a poop, or do anything that involves a concentrated physical effort. Your chest and shoulders become rigid. The muscles in your

abdomen tighten. And your throat -- in particular, your larynx -- becomes completely locked. The locking of the larynx is the body's way of closing the upper end of the windpipe in order to keep air in the lungs. It is called an *effort closure*. Why does your body do this?

Blocking the upper airway at the same time as you tighten your chest and abdominal muscles puts pressure on your lungs and creates internal pressure. This, in turn, creates strength and rigidity. It allows you to push harder. It gives you strength. It's why four inflated tires can hold the weight of a heavy automobile.

Initiating a valsalva maneuver makes sense if you're lifting your 48-inch TV onto its stand. You need the added strength. But it is a non-productive strategy if you're asking someone where the post office is, and you expect to have difficulty saying "post," so you start preparing yourself to push the word out. The very muscles that are tight and rigid and clamped together to give you strength are muscles that should be soft and pliant and relaxed in order to create the resonant tones associated with speech. No wonder you can't speak.

Then why do we tighten everything?

Professor Woody Starkweather in an e-mail on the Stutt-L listserv on March 29, 1995, offered an excellent description of how some children end up misapplying the valsalva maneuver as they first struggle to learn to speak. Here's what Woody said: Personally, I think that most "garden variety" people who stutter (PWS) when they are very young find themselves repeating whole words. At this point, they aren't usually struggling (there are exceptions), but they are still being impeded in their ability to say what they want to by these sometimes long, whole word repetitions. Their first reaction to this is usually frustration. They want to talk and they can't go forward as quickly as they want to.

Typically, this happens between two and four years of age.

At this age, the most common strategy for a child to use who is hindered by something in a task he or she wants to perform is to push hard. If something is in your way, you push it out of the way. The idea that some things work better if you don't try harder is an alien concept to the preschool child, by and large. So they start to push the words out, and it works a little and some of the time because eventually the word does come out, in spite of the pushing, and it feels as though the child has pushed it out.

So he or she learns to push (with subglottal air pressure) when they feel stuck, and a nonproductive, maladaptive strategy for coping with stuttering has been born. The effect on the stuttering behavior is that the repetitions get shorter, i.e., part-word instead of whole word, blockages may increase because at a certain threshold of pushing the vocal folds clamp tighter together (the valsalva reflex), and the tempo of the repetitions increases because pushing harder usually also involves trying to talk faster through the stuttering behavior, that is, trying to stutter faster to get it over with.

There are a variety of strategies -- some kids focus on speeding up during stuttering, others just push hard, others learn very early to avoid by turning away, stopping talking, saying "never mind," etc. And I believe quite strongly that the only way to recover from this problem is first to become very aware of what you are doing during the stuttering.

For an adult, this will usually involve learning about even more strategies that have been layered on top of those early ones, but eventually the PWS can get to know and understand those very early pushing, speeding up, and avoidance behaviors and then learn how to let them go..

Building awareness

So there you have it. Not just one but *two* credible explanations for what causes a speech block, and not once did we have to mention genetics or faulty brain functions.

Losing awareness of your intentions is not specific to stuttering. People develop blocks around all sorts of things. I once knew a guy who was not able to urinate in a men's room whenever someone else was in the room with him. Same problem. For whatever reason (usually such fears are deep-seated) he held himself back by tightening his sphincter, but he didn't know he was doing this. He just knew he couldn't urinate. When the person left the men's room, then his sphincter relaxed, and he could complete his business.

As with most problems like this, the recovery process begins by developing your awareness of what's going on and bringing these unconscious behaviors back into consciousness. This calls for observing each blocking situation carefully, perhaps keeping a diary so you can keep track of what threads are showing up consistently from one blocking experience to another.

Do you block around authority figures. Do you block when you're afraid you'll be wrong. Or when you're afraid of looking foolish? Or aggressive? Or embarrassed? Do anxious feelings come up when you have to assert yourself?

Do you notice that each time you block, you also seem to be holding your breath? What else do you notice you're doing? What else can you begin to bring back to conscious awareness.

Any of the scenarios I described above can cause a speech block. And sometimes, there are more than one operating at the same time. So you really need to pay attention. Nobody said that recovering from blocking is easy. It's not. But making the effort -- and keeping at it -- will eventually pay off by helping you take conscious control of an unconscious reflex.

John C. Harrison is the author of the book "Redefining Stuttering: What the Struggle to Speak is Really All About."

THE STORY OF A RECOVERY

by Ruth Mead, author of *Speech Is A River*

QUESTION 1

First, could you tell us about your life experience with respect to stuttering, and why did you become so genuinely interested in stuttering?

A debilitating stutter that not only destroyed my natural fluency but interfered with my spontaneity, personality and freedom was the major life experience that drove my interest in stuttering.

I spoke early, easily and well from 2 years old until I was 4, almost 5. At that time a trauma occurred that changed me from a spontaneous little chatterbox who didn't give a single thought to how to say words...into a little girl who thought constantly about what to say and how to say it with a minimum of stuttering. The evening of the trauma, sitting at dinner with my family, I asked "please pass the bread" but it came out (this is the first time I had ever stuttered) as "p-p-p-p-p-pplease p-p-p-p-p-p-p-p-pass the b-b-b-b-b-b-b-bread."

The stuttering didn't stop as my parents hoped it would. As I got older, I continued to substitute "trying to speak" for simple natural easy-breezy speaking. I couldn't just blurt words out anymore. My speech revealed that I thought I had to think about how to say words before I said them. That's what was in my mind. Abraham Maslow told his followers at Big Sur that all the problems we were dealing with were rooted in a faulty view of reality. I agree with that.

In case you get the picture of me as a nervous nelly, felled by this thing we call "stuttering", that is not the case. My life was sunny and happy with the exception of stuttering, which I regarded as a torment. I just couldn't accept it, as people in my environment encouraged me to do. I couldn't accept my stutter because it interfered with doing what I wanted to do. For example, from the time I was a small child conversation was a big deal in our household. I would sneak out of bed and down the stairs after I had been tucked in bed and hide in a dark corner of our living room hugging my blanket and a doll or two so I could listen to conversations between my parents, older siblings, and friends, and often went to sleep to the soothing sound of voices.

As I grew older stuttering turned that love of conversation into a two-edged sword. On the one hand was the fun of hanging out with friends and family who loved to shoot the breeze about anything and everything that occurred to us. On the other hand, was the frustration when I stuttered so badly I couldn't join the conversation. Of course, I could always listen. But the frustration of not being able to join in the conversation or even ask questions was sometimes overwhelming.

This shouldn't be difficult for people who don't stutter to understand. Imagine loving to talk about cars with your friends but every time you start to speak you begin to hiccup. You get a few words out about your favorite car and you hiccup and it's not just a tiny little hiccup. Your hiccups might last indefinitely. But hiccups isn't a good metaphor for stuttering because even severe hiccupping isn't in the same league with a stutter as debilitating as mine.

TWO:

I was also motivated to get to the bottom of the stuttering problem because I remembered what it felt like to be able to blurt out anything I wanted to say without a thought as to how to say words. I couldn't have put this into words at the time, but in many ways I felt robbed of just being casual and spontaneous. I loved the freedom to spout off about anything I wanted to say without thinking and planning words in advance, substituting words I thought I *could* say for words I thought I could *not* say. I longed to return to that earlier time.

THREE:

A big motivation to understand stuttering was the fact that my stuttering was selective. I had observed that I could speak perfectly when I was alone. I stuttered horribly when I read aloud in school. But I could read aloud for hours without a single stutter when I knew no one could hear me. I refer to this discovery as "THE 900 POUND GORILLA IN THE ROOM" in SPEECH IS A RIVER because it was this discovery that caused me to doubt the theory that has been around for years: that stuttering is always genetic.

If I can speak easily and well to stuffed animals and babies and when I speak in unison or when I am in a room by myself, this said something about ME. Think about it. What if you went to the doctor with COPD and informed the doctor that you don't have symptoms of COPD when you are sitting alone in a room. It is only when another person walks into the room that you have COPD. That kind of logic not only seemed strange to me. It seemed downright *nuts*. Like an imagination-run-wild or a person in need of the services of a psychiatrist.

I am not saying the predisposition toward stuttering isn't genetic for some stutterers. But for me, the discovery that I could speak naturally and easily when I was alone made me doubt a lot of what passed for science at that time. Nothing seemed to fit the then-current-answers to stuttering after discovering how selective my stuttering was.

FOUR

Free-writing was the one constant in my life that led me to understand flow, resistance to flow, blocking, and emotional anxiety. Most of all, it put me in touch with my inner power. But it took a few years before what I found to be true when I free-wrote began to apply to stuttering.

By "free-writing" I mean "writing with no control, no suggestions, no opinions and no judgments." This means I didn't know what I was going to write until I wrote it. And what ended up on the page was new to me because it didn't come to me from my conscious mind; while writing from my conscious mind means "thinking it up" or "repeating something I've heard or been taught."

But it wasn't long until I ran into something I called my "Thinker" that disagreed with my Doer in almost every way. I woke up at my usual 3 a.m. and started to get out of bed because I wanted to write down one of those "fuzzy notions" nagging at me. But just as I put my feet on the floor, I became aware of a strong resistance to getting out of bed...a thousand thoughts telling me it was too cold in the house and reminding me I was too tired and I had to go to work and it wasn't healthy for me to get up so early. I'm sure that resistance had always been there, but the first time I really noticed it was through free-writing.

So, I argued with this chattering voice until I could see it did me no good, so I simply got out of bed, threw on a robe, and started to write until the fuzzy notion began to develop and take shape on the pages.

But the voice didn't stop. As soon as the writing was flowing the voice told me how stupid I was and how everyone already knew what I was writing about and how I didn't know "squat" about writing. I heard the accusations...but I was noticing something else....that when I ignored that censoring voice and kept on writing, a nice flowing seamlessness happened on the page. I was surprised at what turned up on the pages I wrote. The ideas were fresh and new and original. Everything flowed. I no longer decided what I wanted to say before I said it. I wrote first and THEN it occurred to me: "Ahhh, THAT'S what I wanted to say!" Writing in this way, with no editing and no opinion about what I was writing seemed to be the way to free this part of me that I knew virtually *nothing* about.

I had stumbled onto this all by myself: first, simply writing...and second, only then being conscious of what I wanted to say. I was understanding through free-writing how flow happened and what could destroy flow in my writing...but the truths I discovered in free-writing hadn't yet made the journey from free-writing to speech and especially, to stuttering. When I spoke, I was still as stuck as ever and didn't know what I was going to do.

This free-writing, above all, helped me to deal with the emotional anxiety that always accompanies stuttering. I woke up in the morning, often filled with dread of what was in store for me the rest of the day, and rather than lay in bed and create (with my thoughts) this state of anxiety, I forced myself to get out of bed, go to my notebook, and spell out in black and white how that anxiety felt in my body.....even giving those feelings a label. In this way, I stopped creating anxiety with my thoughts and became an observer, a witness of those thoughts. This put a distance between me and my anxiety (space is required between the observer and the object observed and it is that space that became so important.)

FIVE: THE INSPIRATION THAT LED ME TO FREEDOM

The primary inspiration, however, was my discovery that speech is a river. I had always noticed that everyone else seemed to speak so fluidly and seamlessly that I had to question what it was that made speech so difficult for me. All distractions had to be put away while I spoke as I concentrated on the smallest detail of speech....did I take a breath? Was I relaxed? Was I trying hard enough? Did I glide into that word as I was told I should do? All the years of speech training determined the fact that I spoke out of my memory of what I was told I should do, could do, and ought to be doing to speak more fluidly.

I WAS TOTALLY UNAWARE OF THE AMAZING SYSTEM THAT WAS AND IS ALWAYS MANAGING THAT AUTOMATIC ACTIVITY FOR ME.

When we see an old problem in a completely new way, it's a shock. The world opens up, the body responds, synapses light up, heartbeats quicken, understanding deepens and broadens, and behavior automatically changes. And most of all, old faulty views of what we thought was "reality" suddenly go away on their own because they are upended by a new view of the world.

By the time I was 33 years old speech had become unmanageable. I had come to an absolute knowing that my conscious mind, with all its tricks and techniques, couldn't fix my stuttering. "There's nothing I can do to fix my speech" was totally real to me. That was not a negative thought. It was simply a fact that I finally knew with great certainty because I had done everything

I was told to do to fix stuttering and absolutely nothing worked. The harder I tried to speak fluently, the more violently I stuttered.

What no one, including myself, expected to happen, actually *happened*. I didn't know it then, but I was just one insight away from seeing speech in an entirely different way. When I was most desperate, at the end of my rope, I had an epiphany.

In one crazy off-guard moment an insight can explode in your head, intruding into your awareness, changing the entire landscape of your life....reshaping your understanding, values, beliefs and finally your behavior...for the rest of your life.

What hard work and effort could not and did not do, awareness was able to do. Dr. Bruce Lipton said: "The moment you change your perception is the moment you rewrite the chemistry of your body" and Dr. Theodore Reik often told his students: "The unconscious reveals itself as vision in which an unconscious recognition of certain relations forces its way right through into consciousness."

The day of the insight had been a strange day. I had been in a state of utter and complete hopelessness about ever being able to do anything about my stutter. In that state, I took my writing out to the balcony and sat in the late afternoon sun. I was making myself write, and the stuff I was writing was yawningly *boring*.

Before long an idea occurred to me which I followed...and that idea turned into other ideas and finally my writing turned into random scribbles that seemed to be creating a pattern of some sort. I was drawing wavy lines across the page from left to right, one row of those flowing lines stacked on top of the other, until the whole page was filled with flowing lines....and in the margin I drew what appeared to be cupped hands, (shaped like parenthesis)...and these "hands" seemed to be pushing the wavy lines. The rows and rows of wavy lines across the page, stacked one on top of the other....what did they represent? I had no idea. The ocean? Water? Yes, of course it was water. Flowing water.

Without a thought, I wrote under the flowing lines....."Speech is a river." And a moment later: "Don't push the river."

Those words just sat there for a moment: *Speech is a river. Don't push the river.*

What was *that* about?

And then...it was as if the page came alive and the words suddenly took on meaning, and out of the blue, out of nowhere, I *understood*.

I was seeing it all at once, intuitively understanding what natural fluency was all about....it was speech happening by itself, flowing out of me naturally and effortlessly and with no resistance from my mind. My mind could stop worrying, thinking, running around looking for a new technique or a new workshop or a new therapist. No need to make speech happen anymore. No need to push words out anymore. Speaking and trying-to-speak were suddenly seen by me as two different systems.

No one had ever told me this was even *possible*.

All I can tell you is that *all hell broke loose*. I got it! I absolutely got it!!!! The light from this simple but profound truth blew my old way of thinking to smithereens in a mega-second and gave me goosebumps.

I ran into the living room from the balcony, back and forth, back and forth..... caught up in a frenzy of delight, jumping, high-five-ing everything in sight, clapping my hands.....then grabbing a small umbrella holder, dizzily dancing it around and around the room, all the time squealing, "Speech is a river! It flows by itself. It happens on its own! No need to think about it! Or manufacture it! Or work at it! No need to try! No need to force words out! All I need to do is trust the river to flow by itself!!!!"

The relief my overworked mind felt was as close to real joy and peace as I had ever felt in my life.

I was ushered into what Dr. David Eagleman (THE BRAIN) might have referred to as "*a much more splendid universe*": "If you find space science fascinating, strap in for what's happening in brain science. The conscious mind has been knocked from its perceived position at the center of ourselves and a much more splendid universe is coming into focus."

My old planned, cautious, striving conscious life was being dethroned. But not to worry. I was not my mind or my stuttering. The complexity and brilliance of the system that I actually *AM* stunned me into silence...all of it given to me as some kind of benevolent birthright, a gift I had no way of earning.

This sudden goose bumpy realization of the true nature of the capabilities of my body/brain, operating automatically and spontaneously had everything to do with my return to natural fluency.

I had been given a powerful metaphor that pushed back against everything I had been taught and what I had come to believe on my own. Along with this new clarity came a state of inner calmness in which I was finally able to trust the incredibly complex and competent ability of my brain and body to do its stuff without my conscious interference.

After that revelation, I couldn't be stopped. Stuttering didn't drop off immediately but I never looked at speech in the same way again. I will never tell you I speak perfectly. Friends tell me they can still pick up the "residue" left behind from years of stuttering.....a pause here and there that I am unaware of (in much the same way I can hear my Puerto Rico friend's slight accent hidden in her English.)

Stuttering is no longer an issue in my life.

No advance scanning of words

No debilitating anticipatory fear (since fear is a reaction to thinking)...

No substitution of words I think I *can* say for words I think I *can't* say.

I no longer entertain the possibility of stuttering.

I regained my spontaneity and spunk.

And most of all, I never give the mechanics of speech a thought.

Freedom from stuttering to me means my mind is free from trying to control speech, which was getting to be a full-time job.

I began what I refer to as “the trust experiment.” I learned that trust in the unconscious process of speech is the opposite of the illusion of control. My mindset began to evolve from control to trust. Giving up on control, the work that remains to this day is trust. I talk much more about this trust experiment in the book I am finishing now which I named PUT YOUR SPEECH ON AUTO-PILOT.

Unblocking my natural flow of ideas, speech, emotion and movement took me back to the spontaneous person I was before I started to stutter. AND putting my speech on auto-pilot freed my mind so I felt relieved and free of the stress of trying to do what I had no ability to do with my “other” mind.

SIX

Last, I want to mention the person who had the most to do with getting my discoveries down in black and white for others to read....John Harrison. After I read his book REDEFINING STUTTERING, which confirmed all my own experiences, I got in touch with him. He was an inspiration from the beginning. I sent him the manuscript I had thrown into a bottom drawer of a desk. Because of his encouragement to stop holding back my discoveries, I finished the manuscript. Without John Harrison’s help and encouragement that manuscript would still be gathering dust.

QUESTION 2

Your book "Speech is a River" is a powerful metaphor to influence our perception of stuttering. In her comments on your book, Barbara Dahm states that the common thread in your book is this: “PWS’ let their conscious minds try to control naturally spontaneous speech.” Tell us how you stopped planning and thinking about how to say the words or force air through the blockage you felt in your throat. In other words, the art of letting go would be the key to getting out of the stuttering jail?

After the great insight I struggled with this question: “If speech is automatic, why do I still stutter?” My speech was markedly better right away. But there were still bumps and hesitations and when I returned home from overseas to visit my parents, I went back to full-fledged stuttering for two whole weeks. At that point I realized what free-writing had taught me....that thinking about how I should speak, thinking about techniques, thinking about the mechanics of speech in any way ***interfered with the natural flow of speech***, just as critical thought had always interfered with free writing.

One thing most PWS’ know is that taking massive action against stuttering results in massive failure. The one thing we can do (and will do automatically once we really “get” the great truth that our brain automates speech)....is to stop thinking about the mechanics of speech and stop planning words ahead, and stop forcing words, etc.

What I took massive action against after the river insight was not my stuttering but what I sometimes called my “blockers”. Everything flows in the path of least resistance, and it was resistance I now knew I had to deal with. It was true that what blocked flow for me was my thinking mind (as it came up with one unworkable solution after another). There were too many forms of resistance to mention: thinking of the mechanics of speech, trying to force words out, substituting a word I thought I could say for a word I thought I couldn’t say. The list was endless.

So instead of dealing with each blocker separately (like forcing words out) I dealt with my mind's illusion of control. What made that illusion run and take cover was the scientifically proven fact that the brain/body automates speech when I make my bossy chattering mind stand aside and allow the body to do its thing without interference.

Since speech is instinctual, planning words and thinking ahead as to how to say words is not only ridiculous, it also messes with the flow of words. One of the great tennis players of our time wrote about how he wins his matches. After the first match, the player approaches his opponent and asks "I just wanted to ask you how you manage that marvelous wrist movement of yours?" That question puts the opponents focus on his wrist movement and he begins to think about how he does that "marvelous wrist movement"...and his game goes south from that point.

I had to let go of thoughts relating in any way to the mechanics of speech. *It didn't matter if these thoughts were negative or positive.* When I thought "I'm talking really well now" it was as destructive to natural fluency as "I'm really messing up now." So, replacing a negative thought with a positive thought didn't work for me. *For me it was trying to control speech (thinking of the mechanics of speech), not the positivity or negativity of the thought, that messed with my natural fluency.*

Why do we have to let go of our resistance in all its forms? Something scientists agree on is that we are not conscious of the vast majority of our brain's ongoing activities and wouldn't want to be. Our minds simply have no access to the intricate details as to how we talk, walk, see, breathe or understand. And that's a good thing. Also, we know that when the conscious mind is finally at the end of its rope, not knowing what to do, it tends to drop out of a task, turning it over instead to our "unconscious" or "inner power"...outside the radar of the control of the conscious mind.

We know that consciousness interferes with the brain's well-oiled processes. The best way to mess up your piano piece is to concentrate on your fingers; the best way to miss the golf ball is to analyze your swing. Suzuki, the renowned Zen Master taught: "As soon as we reflect, deliberate and conceptualize, the original unconsciousness is lost and a thought interferes. Calculation, which is miscalculation, sets in." And later: "Man is a thinking reed but his great works are done when he is not thinking." It's a little like this:

"A centipede was happy quite, Until a frog in fun
Said "pray tell which leg comes after which?"
This raised her mind to such a pitch
She lay distracted in the ditch
Not knowing how to run."

The answer for me to "How do you quit thinking about how to say words?" was simply Trust. My conscious mind trusting my inner power. Your brain/body holds knowledge of things your mind can't access. Riding a bike, tying your shoes, typing on a keyboard, or steering your car into a parking space while speaking on your cell phone are examples of this. You execute these actions easily but without knowing how you do it. So, there is a huge gap between what your brain/body can do and what you can tap into with your conscious mind.

TRUST MEANS LETTING GO

“Knowing yourself now requires the understanding that conscious you occupies only a small room in the mansion of the brain and it has little control over the reality constructed for you,” writes David Eagleman in INCOGNITO. What the conscious mind learns to do is to stand aside, stop chattering, making suggestions, and interfering with the flow. That is the skill I learned: Let go. Get out of the way. Stand aside. Stop trying to control speech. And let the river flow by itself. Speech is a river; don’t push the river.

Flow happened by itself when my mind stopped chattering, criticizing, and making suggestions and simply stood aside and *trusted the natural process of speech to happen automatically*.

Trust in this inner power removed the decades long, deep-rooted blocks that had been sabotaging my natural fluency, my ideas, my spontaneity, my personality and my relationships.... so I could finally manifest this spontaneity in more and more areas of my life naturally and effortlessly.

So how did my mindset turn from suffering the illusion of control....to trust in the efficient and amazing system that manages the speaking process for me?

REFUSING TO THINK BEFORE I SPEAK

I started out with a simple rule: “The body automates speech, so do not send your body mixed messages by thinking about the mechanics of speech...either what to say or how to say it.” This was easier said than done. A few days after the Big Bang experience, I went to a small bakery in Munich close to where I lived. It was a great place to write, much like Starbucks here in the States. I actually wanted one of Frau Weber’s incredible cinnamon rolls and I began to obsess with “How am I going to ask for a cinnamon roll, when I can’t say my s’s without stuttering?” Obviously, I was still steeped in my habit of thinking before I spoke.

I was aware of what I was thinking and ordered myself not to give a single thought ahead of time to what I was going to order. And this time I told myself why I didn’t need to think ahead of what I was going to say....because thinking of what I was going to say ahead of time was a big time blocker.

I also had been working on being in the present moment. “In the moment” means “not a moment before we speak in a thought or plan” and “not a moment after we speak in a correction or edit.”

So, I was standing in line with four people ahead of me and I urgently told myself I had to know what I was going to say and how I was going to say it before I ordered. But I stayed in the present moment and didn’t allow myself to give the words I was going to say a single thought.

The line then dwindled to three, then two. Now there was only one person in front of me and I felt more and more urgent to think ahead about what I was going to say and how I would say it but I was staunch in my decision to keep my mind in the moment and refuse to plan ahead, no matter how my mind begged. This was war. This wanting to plan words before I spoke them was butting heads with my determination to stay in the moment. Finally I was face to face with Frau Weber and I blurted: “I would like a cup of coffee, please.” (Frau Weber spoke English).

“Is that all?” she asked.

“Yes” I answered.

I’m sure this sounds like a very trivial accomplishment; but for me it was *big stuff*. I had seriously wanted to eliminate those 400 calorie cinnamon rolls....and I had not only spoken easily with no pre-planning but I satisfied my desire to stop consuming those extra calories.

This was the *first* time I had ever, if you can believe it, turned the tables on my chattering mind as it pertained to speaking....actually taking control of my mind instead of letting it control my behavior. I know that’s hard to believe but it’s true. The confidence I felt that I could actually manage my mind instead of allowing it to control me was my victory.

It was the simple metaphor “speech is a river” (which I interpreted as “speech runs on auto-pilot) that served as a basis for ignoring the constant suggestions coming from my mind.

It still strikes me as odd that it took so long to discover that *something outside the radar of my opinionated mind could get on with the job of speaking without my continual tampering*.

I believe I mentioned in SPEECH IS A RIVER that I returned to speech therapy after the insight. We were working on our breathing again for the umpteenth time. And it struck me as I stood there (making a big deal out of how to breathe and when to breathe) that if breathing, like speech, is automatic (by automatic I mean “Happens on its own without thinking about it”), it was ridiculous to give thought and effort to what was done automatically and spontaneously by unconscious processes not under my control.

GARAGE SALE

The rest of that decade was like a continuous garage sale in which I threw all those things on the table that were no longer necessary for me, and, in fact, *interfered* with the flow of speech.

The more aware I became that my brain/body actually automates speech, the bolder I became. The fact that my body automates speech was the main principle that I used to know what to toss out and what to keep. “This masker is now worthless to me.” “This metronome is unnecessary now.” “This belt I put around my diaphragm to practice breathinglook! Gone!”

Throw it all on the bargain table. It all goes. Give it away. It doesn’t matter what happens to it so long as I get rid of it. If speech is spontaneous and automatic, why do I need any of it? Those things imply that I have to make speech happen, not let it happen. So, I don’t need it. Let it go.

And there were invisible things I had to get rid of. Offering myself options.....exchanging words I thought I could NOT say for words I thought I COULD say.....all of that had to go. Even the thought that there are words I can’t say eventually went away on its own. The illusion that I could control speech.....that went away on its own. Holding back instead of blurting out whatever came to mind (and trusting my unconscious to weed out whatever might be offensive) went away mostly on its own.

In fact, the realization that my Unconscious was more than a System (as “System 1” implies “impersonal”) was a very important part of my journey. I found through free-writing that “it” had a mind of its own that was funnier, kinder, more sensitive to others and far more brilliant than my conscious mind.

Effortless, spontaneous System 1 is now the driver of my speech. During flow, the brain enters a state of hypo-frontality, meaning that parts of the prefrontal cortex become much less active. Consciousness of what to say and how to say it is left on the sidelines.

For natural fluency, there's really no other choice but to leave effortful conscious System 2 on the sidelines. Why? Because the automatic brain performs at speeds the conscious mind can't possibly keep up with. When I found myself holding back until my slow conscious mind thought about how to say a word, the timing and sync went out the window.

This doesn't just apply to speech. Books on athletics are full of this struggle between two forces (which we could call flow and interference with the flow).

"Take the game of baseball, in which a fastball can travel from the pitcher's mound to the home plate at one hundred miles an hour. In order to make contact with the ball, the brain has only about four tenths of a second to react. In that time, it has to process and orchestrate an intricate sequence of movements to hit the ball. Batters connect with balls all the time, but they're not doing it consciously. The ball simply travels too quickly for the athlete to be consciously aware of its position and the hit is over before the batter can register what happened. Not only has consciousness been left on the sidelines, it's also been left in the dust." David Eagleman, *THE BRAIN*

The book *SEVEN SECRETS OF WORLD CLASS ATHLETES* describes the law of motion which works just as well when applied to speech as it does to playing ball. The law, applied to speech, goes like this: *In order for natural speech to occur, a signal enters the brain. If that signal goes directly to the motor system, speech will be fluid, effortless and effective. But if conscious thought interferes with the signal, speech will not be fluid, effortless or effective.*

I didn't consciously try to drive wrong beliefs away or push them underground or repress them. When I discovered and then TRUSTED the great truth that the brain automates speech and all I have to do is stand aside for that river to flow, old programs and habitual reactions fell away by themselves.

After that, it was a process in which I saw that I didn't have to believe my lying mind. I could walk away, ignore it. The word "fraudulent" occurred to me often in regard to my mind. When I saw that speech is automatic, natural and spontaneous my old beliefs were simply exposed as fraudulent.

One thing I stopped doing was ARGUING with my blaming accusing mind. Instead of wasting time arguing, I simply kept on doing what I was doing. If I was writing I kept on writing, turning a deaf ear to the lectures and accusations of my mind. *Simply continuing to write* was my best revenge. Eventually this carried over to my speech.

To just "be" is effortless...that is the meaning of flow and grace.. Simply be-ing is natural. Spontaneous. Automatic. It is the opposite of "think, plan, try, work, put forth effort, push."

Why was the concept of "effortlessness" so hard for me? Because it seemed that if I didn't think, do something, work according to my own little plan (my oughts, shoulds, coulds, woulds), to get over stuttering, then I'd be lost in a sea of inaction with no direction whatsoever. When I wasn't acting to change my speech, I was filled with panic, afraid of doing nothing. It felt like my mind

was way out ahead, acting alone, leading the parade, never acting in a secondary position, in unity with my own inner river.

Details as to how my conscious mind got out of the driver's seat of my speech is another story, one that I share in the book I am writing now. All I need to tell you now is that when my conscious mind got out of the driver's seat and into the passenger seat, speech flowed as free as a river because my mind wasn't blocking those impulses and promptings anymore.

I felt natural and free and spontaneous, feeling as if I innately "had what it took" without trying or putting forth effort or forcing words out. I knew the words would come. I don't mean I *tried* to know. I mean I *knew*. Speech was thoughtlessly executed and after I spoke there was no self-congratulation. The reward was always flow, grace, effortlessness...being in the zone, a place of unthinking spontaneity. No thinking about how to speak. No thoughts flashing on and off as to the consequences if I couldn't get words out. No running ahead, worrying or deliberating. Just trusting the spontaneous part of me, with a deep sense of confidence.

If the river within me is as powerful and brilliant and loving as scientists say it is, I could trust it. My feeble mind no longer was allowed to boss it around.

I just kept trusting, letting go and practicing non-resistance. I didn't only let go and trust the natural flow of words. The amazing thing is that I was able to let go and trust the flow in other areas of my life.

QUESTION 3

"Richard Parent's summary of the philosophy underlying the metaphor 'Speech is a River': 'The final outcome that was obvious to me was that speech being, by definition, a spontaneous act, it should not be controlled. Consequently, people who stutter must come to a point where they do not control their speech, letting it flow like a river, trusting their inner power'. Do you have any examples to share with us to illustrate this interesting idea (of an inner power)?"

I fully agree with Richard Parent's summary of the philosophy underlying "Speech is a River" and would like to comment on what "trusting my inner power" implies.

My speech changed when I stopped controlling speech and started trusting this behind-the-scenes "inner power" of the unconscious that works spontaneously, automatically, efficiently when my conscious mind stands aside.

When trying to understand the strange details of human behavior we sometimes appeal to a "dual process" account. In this view, we talk about operating on two separate systems: one (my inner power) is fast, automatic and not conscious of itself. The other is slow, cognitive and conscious. The first system can be labeled automatic, intuitive, holistic, responsive and instinctual; the second system is cognitive, systematic, analytical, rule-based and reactive.

Daniel Kahneman refers to these two entities as *Effortless* System 1 and *Effortful* System 2.

System 1 which I personalize as “Big Me” is my hidden inner intelligence (my inner power) which is staggering in its brilliance and efficiency. What it doesn’t already know (using billions of memory cells and neurological communication circuits), this inner intelligence learns with childlike ease, automatically, with no help from my conscious mind. System 1 is unconscious of itself, does not take credit for the work it does, is instinctive, brilliant, efficient and acts on its own without being told to do what it does.

Most of what we do is not under our conscious control. Vast jungles of neurons operate these programs. The conscious you is the smallest bit of what’s transpiring. Although we are dependent on the functions of the brain for our inner lives, the brain runs its own show. The conscious mind has no right of entry. And yet it somehow manages to take all the credit for what is going on. One writer put it like this: “Your conscious mind is like a stowaway on a transatlantic steamship, taking credit for the journey without acknowledging the massive engineering underfoot.”

Our ‘inner power’ effortlessly, efficiently and automatically performs its work 24/7. Thousands of different automatic operations are taking place every moment. My eyes are moving effortlessly and automatically. At the same time, again without conscious effort, my heart is pumping and my breath is going in and out, keeping a complicated system of organs, glands and muscles nourished and working. It constantly coordinates and synchronizes processes that make it possible to walk and talk. Without conscious effort billions of cells are functioning, reproducing and fighting off disease. Notice the way words spill out of your mouth more quickly than you could consciously do. Your brain is working behind the scenes, crafting and producing language, conjugations and complex thoughts for you. (Dr. Daniel Kahneman)

When you walk up a flight of stairs while having a conversation, you have no idea how you calculate the dozens of micro-connections of your body’s balance and how your tongue dynamically whips around to produce the right sounds for your language. All we know is that it is not accomplished consciously.

The same behind-the-scenes work is true of ideas. We take conscious credit for all our ideas, as though we’ve done the hard work in generating them. But in fact, your brain (unconscious-of-itself) has been working on those ideas—consolidating memories, trying out new combinations, evaluating the consequences—for hours or months before the idea rises to your awareness and you declare “I just thought of something. James Clark Maxwell, the famous mathematician, referred to this inner power as “something” within him who discovered his famous equations. He admitted he had no idea how ideas came to him...they simply came to him.

William Blake wrote of this inner power: “I have written this poem, sometimes 20 lines at a time without premeditation and even against my conscious will.” And Carl Jung referred to this inner power: “In each of us there is another whom we do not know.” “Pink Floyd” referred to his inner power as “There’s someone in my head but it’s not me.”

One scientist spoke of this inner power so staggering in its power and brilliance that if we undertook to create an electronic memory of a capacity equal to the human one (by using the most sophisticated computer parts yet devised), the finished product would be larger than three Empire State Buildings...and no computer yet made is capable of doing the calculations and giving the necessary muscle orders involved in something as simple as hitting a fast ball in the time required to do so.

The author of THE BRAIN cited an example of how this inner power works by showing what happens when it malfunctions: “The unconscious machinery of our brains is at work all the time, but it runs so smoothly that we’re typically unaware of its operations. As a result, it’s often easiest to appreciate only when it stops working. What would it be like if we had to consciously think about simple actions that we normally take for granted, such as the seemingly straightforward act of walking? To find out, I went to speak with a man named Ian Waterman.

“When Ian was nineteen years old, he suffered a rare type of nerve damage as a result of a fierce case of gastric flu. He lost the sensory nerves that tell the brain about touch, as well as the position of one’s own limbs (known as proprioception). As a result, Ian could no longer manage any of the movements of his body automatically. Doctors told him that he would be confined to a wheelchair for the rest of his life, despite the fact that his muscles were fine.”

Ian wasn’t willing to let his condition confine him to a life without movement. So, he gets up and goes, but the whole of his waking life requires him to think consciously about every movement his body makes. Ian has to move his body with focused, conscious determination. He uses his visual system to monitor the position of his limbs...he must anticipate the exact distance of each step and land it with his leg braced. Every step he takes is calculated and coordinated by his conscious mind.

Having lost his ability to walk automatically, Ian is highly cognizant of the miraculous coordination that most of us take for granted when going on a stroll. Everyone around him is moving around so fluidly and seamlessly, he points out, that they’re totally unaware of THE AMAZING SYSTEM THAT’S MANAGING THAT PROCESS FOR THEM. (Caps are mine)

TWO ATTITUDES TOWARD THIS INNER POWER: TRUST OR CONTROL

While Ian has actually lost his automaticity, PWS only THINK or IMAGINE they have lost this power because it often feels like it. To trust my feelings instead of facts seemed to be one of my major downfalls. These incorrect feelings may be why I tried to replace automatic speech with conscious controlled speech.

What do I mean by “Trust yourself”? I don’t mean positive thinking...for example, expecting that I am going to never stutter again. *Trusting myself means letting my body speak naturally without consciously working at it or thinking about it.* Sometimes I call this “trusting my body”. Trusting my body in tennis means letting my body hit the ball. Trusting my body in speaking means letting my body (this includes my brain, motor system, etc., of course) do its thing.

When I stopped trying to make speech happen, System 1 (the part of me that is not conscious of itself) was able to do its own thing and proved to be good at spontaneous speech, original ideas, innovation, instinct, intuition and initiative.

When I was still trying like crazy to speak well (constantly thinking, thinking, thinking how to speak), all it meant is that I was still trying to control my speech, because I was ignorant of the true capabilities of System 1, my inner power. I know now that while my mind can “will” to do a thing, it can’t perform it. Performance itself is left to System 1.

Most of us have no awareness of System 1. Even though “it” is always there working its magic, I was totally unaware of this amazing system that is always looking out for me, silently managing the work it does spontaneously and automatically.

We can think of these two forces as the Doer and the Thinker. The story of Caruso, the great tenor, who wrote of Big Me and Little Me, was one of the stories that gave me a hint of what I was doing to block my flow: One part of me (the inner power) doing the singing or talking or walking or breathing.....and the other part of me resisting, chattering, criticizing, interrupting, interfering and scaring the daylights out of me.

SEEING THROUGH THE ILLUSION OF CONTROL

Our minds take credit for our ideas, preferences, and behaviors without even *wondering about* the vast hidden work going on behind the scenes. Consider what happens when you move your arm. Your brain depends on thousands of nerve fibers, registering states of contraction and stretching and yet you aren’t conscious of that lightning storm of neural activity. Your conscious mind has nothing to do with that lightning storm. You are simply conscious that your limb moved and that it is somewhere else now.

Scientists in the last few years remind us that our conscious mind is never at the center of action....instead it is “far out on a distant edge, hearing but whispers of the activity.” But it is as if we believe that our inner power and the mind are 50/50...and therefore deserve a 50/50 chance to be in control. The inner power, however, drives the boat and all that a dominant, strong, interfering conscious mind does is create conflict. Like a backseat driver.

Your System 1 already knows how to talk and walk and see and hear and anything it doesn’t know it learns at the speed of light. But the mind has a tendency to butt in if what happens doesn’t happen immediately or happen in the way the mind expects it to happen. In this case, the mind needs to refrain from giving “how-to instructions” or force itself to do System 1’s job, but simply let go and wait to see what happens. A growing confidence in the ability of System 1 will emerge from that.

How do I know I am trusting System 1? I often don’t. But I do know when I have lost trust. When I make an effort to say words or force speech it is from lack of trust in my automatic inner power to happen on its own.

Why does conscious System 2 take credit for the ideas and behaviors produced by System 1? Because the Unconscious is so brilliant and efficient it manages to work its magic in secret, conjuring up ideas like tremendous magic and does it so efficiently we don’t notice it because this inner power doesn’t allow its stupendous operating system to be probed by conscious cognition.

So, my new relationship between System 1 and 2 is based on the phrase “trust thyself” (my mind trusting this brilliant efficient System we call System 1.)

By “trusting their inner power” I mean “trusting the unconscious activity and processes that produce speech automatically” or “trusting the spontaneous automatic way speech happens without interference of my conscious mind”. The more I experienced the true capabilities of System 1, the more I trusted it.

The more I trusted, the more I felt I could ask this inner power to go to bat for me....to put my speech on auto-pilot so I didn't need to think about it. There was a time when my mind was constantly asking for my inner power to take over my speech. The more this happened, the quicker my trust grew in the ability of my amazing body to put my speech on auto-pilot.

This inner power is generous...never charging for what it gives me, never throwing my needs up to me. That's why I call natural fluency a "gift." I could finally relax since I didn't need to think about how to say words anymore. I heard myself saying "thank you" many times a day at first. Gratitude for this free gift of natural fluency sometimes overwhelms me, even now.

QUESTION 4

In your book, there are many similarities in thinking with John Harrison's book "Redefining Stuttering", including the role of the Stuttering Hexagon. In particular, you refer to the notion of "zone" that Richard explains (in French in your book) as follows: "Speaking of the Zone, the authors state the following: when the brain and body collaborate in harmony, all movement is performed on automatic pilot, without any disagreement; in short, the PWS is in the zone. The opposite of being in the Zone means poor quality of execution." It reminds me of a state of mind close to mindfulness meditation, isn't it? In this respect, do you think that the daily exercise of mindfulness mediation can constitute a significant asset in the recovery from stuttering?

There's an interesting upshot to automatized skills. Attempts to consciously interfere with them worsen their performance. And I agree with Richard's statement: "When the brain and body collaborate in harmony, all movement is performed on automatic pilot, without any disagreement; in short, the PWS is in the zone. The opposite of being in the Zone means poor quality of execution."

Letting go of the illusion that the conscious mind can control speech moves us onto another level. At that time a whole new world opens to us. Some of us refer to it as the Zone.

Being in the Zone produces the kind of spontaneous performance which occurs only when the mind stands aside. As you are well aware, the "zone" speaks of a far more natural and effective process for learning and doing almost anything. This state is similar to the way we all learned to talk when we spoke from the generative unconscious as new intuitions and ideas are forming, at which time the censor we call the mind stands aside and speech goes on auto-pilot. We act from the effortless unconscious more than the deliberate self-conscious mind; the spinal and midbrain areas of the nervous system more than the cerebral cortex. This process doesn't have to be learned, of course. We already know it. We don't KNOW that we know it. We simply assume that what the body does so efficiently must be something it knows. So, we don't need to change the brain. We don't need to reprogram it. All that is needed is to rid ourselves of the resistance to spontaneity and "just let speech happen"

Reflect on the state of mind of a baseball player who is said to be up on his game or in the zone. Is he mindful as to how he should hit each ball? Is he thinking at all? No, in fact we could refer to this state of mind as "He is out of his mind." He is not conscious of himself. He isn't conscious of his movements. He doesn't plan what he will do ahead of time. In fact, there is an intuitive sense that the mind is standing aside watching but not doing anything. Peak performance, as we

know, never happens when the players think about what they are doing or put forth effort, or try harder.

The truth is that the mind can “will” to speak well....but it can't produce natural fluency. Natural fluency is what it is....natural and effortless and so, of course, not produced by thought and effort. The truth is this: my mind suffered from the illusion that I had to do everything or it wouldn't get done. I had to form every word, remember to take a deep breath before I spoke, remember to glide into words I thought I couldn't say and substitute words I *thought* I could say for words I *thought* I could not say.

But when awareness hit me, I began to speak “out of my mind”. Maybe a better way to describe this state is by saying that when the mind stands aside, the body is so in tune with the brain that automatic functions flow without interference. Flow has no time or room for thinking how badly or well I am speaking or about the mechanics and how-to of speaking. In fact, as we know, the mind with all its suggestions, opinions, and beliefs as to how speech happens must merely stand aside so speech can flow.

You mention “mindfulness”. If by that you mean living in the present moment, I agree mindfulness is important. But if you mean being conscious or mindful of the words I am speaking or how to say those words (as many people believe), of course that isn't true. When I speak fluently, I am “out of my mind.” I am mindless. I don't think what I am saying or how to say it. The common factor in all the times when speech was effortless for me was the complete absence of thinking, trying, planning, or mindfulness of how to say words.

Arriving at the Zone seemed more organic and natural than anything I'd ever experienced since I started to stutter. As I dealt with over-monitoring and over-controlling, my jerky speech became less jerky and began to flow, a flow that wasn't scripted, words spoken with no thought, plan, preparation, lectures, expectations.

Yes, I agree that there are many likenesses in my philosophy to John Harrison's. It was John Harrison's chapter “Zen and the Art of Fluency” in REDEFINING STUTTERING, that made the biggest impression on me. In that chapter he dealt with being in the zone and about speech as instinctive, natural and spontaneous. That was the first time I found confirmation for what I had written in the very rough draft of SPEECH IS A RIVER (but which I had thrown into a drawer where it was gathering dust until I read John's book and got in touch with him.) John asked me to send that manuscript to him and his encouragement and suggestions changed everything.

QUESTION 5

“You seem to have a somewhat "complicated" history with therapies and therapists, especially speech-language pathologists. Could you summarize in a few words your whole experience with these therapies?”

I had a tendency to believe what speech therapists told me. I am a Pragmatist so I would try everything out for as long as I could, until I could definitely see it wasn't working.

When I was told to exert effort when I was speaking, replacing phonation with effort, I tried it. The more I tried, the more violently I stuttered. But in the beginning I kept working at it anyway. My response was NOT: “My therapist tells me to think hard about how to say words, but the more I

do that, the more I stutter. So, I'm moving on." Oh no! My response was "My therapist tells me to think hard about how to say words and even though the more I do that the more I stutter, *I'm going to try harder.*" I wasted many years with that attitude.

Stuttering gained more and more power over me because I had no understanding of what was going on or what I was doing that changed my once-effortless speech into such a war with words. I was fearful and anxious because I had no any idea at that time when this stuttering was going to happen... or why.

I finally decided that I would do everything in my power to understand what was going on when I talked and what I was doing to resist the easy flow that speech had once been for me. I am sure speech therapy has changed but at the time I experienced it, therapy was all about the "outer game" (techniques, workshops, and public speaking) rather than dealing with what was happening within my own self. This is the essence of John Harrison's "hexagon" or it seems so to me.

My speech therapists watched as I spoke. When I spoke, I stuttered. Then I began to try not to stutter. I kept trying to spit words out until I was blue in the face. My muscles would tense around my mouth. My eyebrows would set in a serious determined frown, and I would start panting and pushing like crazy, having NO idea I was making fluency impossible.

I had simply exchanged "talking" for "trying to talk", but I didn't realize it. Neither did the therapists. Or if they did, they didn't mention it to me. In fact, at that point, the stock response of the therapist was "That's much better. Now just try to relax. Take it easy. Let's try that again." (Didn't they know I had no understanding whatsoever as to how to "try to relax"?) I still don't know what "trying to relax" means since relaxing and trying to relax are as opposite as speaking and trying to speak.

Russ Hicks and Dori Holte tell us how they view speech therapy and they might be more in touch with recent therapy than I am:

Russ Hicks of Dallas wrote what he had been taught: "Control your stuttering and you will be fluent." He continues: "Everyone believed I just didn't work hard enough, that I just didn't care enough...maybe I wasn't smart enough...even I believed that. If you can control it for a month, why can't you control it forever? You just need to work harder and care more, or get smarter."

Dori Holte writes in VOICE UNEARTHED, "The primary message young children get in stuttering therapy is that they can and should manage their speech - in other words, try not to stutter - by utilizing speech tools and techniques. Is it possible that the anxiety this causes can create an even greater burden? Can that burden lead to excessive silence and disengagement - a far greater handicap than the stuttering itself?"

As I mentioned earlier, Abraham Maslow taught at Big Sur that every problem in the USA is rooted in a faulty view of reality. I truly believe that if one of my therapists would have said "How are you looking at speech?" it might have helped me. If you see a child forcing words out, the obvious question to me is "If speech causes you to work so hard at something that is instinctive...gasping, panting, pushing, forcing words out of your mouth, it makes me wonder how you are looking at speech?" But nothing like that ever happened.

QUESTION 6

“As such, would you have any advice for my fellow students, all speech-language pathologists, in this new university specialized training, who are planning to work with stuttering children, teenagers and adults?”

The most important thing for me was becoming absolutely convinced that speech truly is a river and flows in the path of least resistance. This is not a statement I learned to accept. It's not just *thinking* I believe that my body takes care of speech if my conscious mind stays out of the way. I was speaking out of my experience. When the flow was happening in my speech and I interfered, natural fluency took wings and flew away. It happened time after time until I was positive it was true.

I think helping the child to notice what is happening in his own speech is important. Therapists told me that I was forcing words out and that was okay, but I think it would have been more helpful if they had given me a mirror and let me watch myself forcing words, bringing my own observations into play.

When I truly believe that my brain/body automates speech for me, it shows in my speech. I used to look for my beliefs....asking myself “what do you believe about this?” And finally, after many years, I found that beliefs aren't there standing in a row, easily identifiable as beliefs. In fact, I finally discovered that beliefs are always hidden in my behavior. I can look at my behavior and get an idea of what I believe. Behavior is a reflection of what we call “beliefs.”

The key to positive change in the way I spoke was found in being convinced of this one profound truth:

“Your brain/body automates speech for you. Speech is far too complex for you to control consciously. This means you do not need to ever waste another moment thinking about how to say words.”

It's like “before” and “after.” Before you truly believe that your inner power puts your speech on auto-pilot, statements like “You need to practice breathing” or “You need to take a deep breath before you speak” or “You need to send energy to your vocal cords” are going to sound rational. After you get the picture, those same statements will sound ridiculous.

CREATE A NEW METAPHOR

Therapists used to swamp me with words, words and more words, but the only way words ever had any effect on my behavior was as a result of truly *understanding something I had not previously understood*. This new understanding always seemed to happen as a result of finding a new metaphor (something physical and visible) that explained something non-physical and invisible. Like you could begin to understand a tiny bit about electricity (unseen) if I told you to compare it to a pipe with water running through it. That's a poor example, but the best one that came to mind this moment.

That's why connecting the way the body automates speech to something we know about in our own lives is so important. When you can see a young person attempting to control his speech,

it's hard to explain the unconscious process by which natural fluency happens and long verbal explanations never worked to help me understand....but a good metaphor did what mere words could not.

Since so many PWS are male, I like to compare the way speech happens to the way shifting takes place in a car with automatic transmission. Before the automatic transmission, we used to shift gears manually. But with the automatic transmission, the gears still shift...but we don't shift the gears manually. We don't think about how to shift gears anymore. That's what an automatic transmission does. It shifts gears automatically.

A 14-year-old neighbor stuttered very badly and one day I connected the way an automatic transmission works with the natural way of speaking. I could tell he didn't get it at all. But almost a year later, George couldn't wait to tell me about his new discovery. "Hey" he says, "Think about this.....If speech is automatic then trying to force words out is a little like trying to shift an automatic transmission manually. And that's really crazy." That image, planted in his mind like a seed, produced something new in his awareness that was all his own and not something he was simply repeating.

Another thing that gives PWS a new look at stuttering is to ask if there are times he can speak without stuttering at all. I often ask if this person notices whether or not he can read aloud to himself, when no one else is around, without stuttering. Most of the children who stutter find there are many times they can speak fluently....when they speak to a baby, or an animal, or a doll or stuffed animal, or when they speak in unison, or when they read aloud to themselves when no one is around, or when they sing, or when they get "out of their mind angry", as one teenager put it.

Most young people simply don't realize they can read aloud fluently when they are in a room by themselves and believe no one else is in earshot. When they try it, most young people are able to read aloud without stuttering (if this person knows he is alone and no one is listening.) At times like this, they are not trying to remember how to say words or remembering they should take a deep breath before speaking; so that's a good thing. Relying on one's automatic process to happen on its own rather than relying on one's memory of what to say or how to say it makes all the difference.

When a person who stutters knows there are times when he can speak fluently and without thought or effort, this engenders trust in his natural ability. Trust in the spontaneous automatic process of speaking happens when we see that speech happens for us without thought or effort over and over and over again. We can depend on it. We can take it to the bank.

I also want to make the PWS aware of his forms of resistance to flow and how these blockers destroy natural fluency. This resistance is not happening *to* him. *He is doing the resisting. He is actually resisting the flow himself. Seeing the many forms of resistance is sometimes the first time he takes responsibility for what he is doing to make stuttering occur.*

One last word, and that is that stutterers tend to feel hopeless. Dr. Wendell Johnson referred to this trait as "copelessness." So even if you think that speech can't be cured or that speech is genetic and Lucy is always going to stutter like her Uncle Ben, try to keep it to yourself. In the first place, I think your assessment is wrong. But even if you are right and I am wrong, a hopeless

stutterer doesn't need to have his worst fears confirmed by his therapist. I speak from experience here.

Dealing with severe stuttering taught me how to remove the decades long, deep-rooted blocks that had been sabotaging my natural fluency, my ideas, my spontaneity, my personality and my relationships so I could finally manifest this spontaneity in more and more areas of my life naturally and effortlessly. In the book I am writing now I give two main exercises that had a lot to do with sustaining the flow throughout the years. It would take too much time to go into those exercises at this time.

QUESTION 7

What do you think of the following paradox: the PWS suffers from stuttering because she cannot communicate verbally with others as she would like, which implies that she wants to communicate. Suffering would not exist if this desire were absent. The PWS are therefore communication-prone people, frustrated communicators, unlike some fluent people who lose interest in verbal communication, aren't they?

When I first read this question, I thought you were asking if wanting to speak well is behind the behavior we call stuttering. But I believe now that you are asking if communication-prone people are more apt to stutter than people uninterested in verbal communication.

It may be true that stuttering occurs in frustrated communicators more than those who have no interest in communication. But wanting to speak well wouldn't be a problem if natural fluency was still "there". It was in the absence of natural fluency (after a few years of spontaneous and easy speech) that I began to want to speak more fluently. And wanting to speak well had its problems.

This is very true in other areas of our lives. There is much current science, especially in the field of athletics that postulates an inverse relationship between strong desire/strong intention and execution.

One would think the opposite: we all imagine that a positive relationship exists between desire and execution. Focused wanting and determination is what athletes, for example, believe separates them from the field. But appearances in this case are deceiving.

The insertion of conscious deliberation into the flow of speech (brought on by intense desire) causes a huge problem. Suppose the brain and body are working together (the brain sending commands to the body and the body obeying seamlessly) when suddenly something happens. The body which was acting seamlessly on the commands of the brain is now frustrated because something like a "censor" has entered the scene and starts shouting orders to the body....so the body is getting mixed messages....the brain sending its silent commands to the body at the same time the mind is also telling the body what to do. (from INCOGNITO)

In THE SEVEN SECRETS OF WORLD CLASS ATHLETES, two great coaches tell us that desire or Intention drives us to try harder. "Trying harder creates tension, creates anxiety, creates an over eagerness to succeed" Steven Yellin and Buddy Biancalana write, informing us that desire and intention translate into the breakdown of the processes that create effortless motion: "If an intention is foremost in the mind with a 'life or death consequence', then it trips an alarm in the

prefrontal cortex, which then delays its arrival at the motor system and shuts down the fast-twitch muscles. When the Fluid Motion Factor is not active, fluid, and effortless, powerful motion is almost impossible to achieve.”

Infielder Nick Green talks about desire and intention: “In one situation I was in, I had to get a hit to win the game. That was not a thought I wanted to have. I understand the relationship between strong intention and the inability to execute. I was able to correct that thinking and manage to get a hit. If I did not get that thought out of my head, there was no chance I would have gotten a hit. To be honest with you, I wish I could not think at all when at bat. When I am hitting well, I don’t think about trying to get a hit. It just happens. I know this may sound strange but I would like to forget about baseball when I am in a game.”

What desire or intention does to the stutterer is very similar to what it does to the athlete: It drives us to try harder and trying harder creates tension, creates anxiety, and creates an over-eagerness to succeed.

QUESTION 8

HOW DO YOU VIEW THIS DISORDER, PARTICULARLY IN THE LIGHT OF THE LATEST SCIENTIFIC ADVANCES?

Stuttering seems to me to be the result of a dysfunctional and disorderly relationship between my effortless flowing innate inner power and my effortful reactive resistant mind. David Eagleman referred to the relationship between these two systems as “an uneasy interaction between two characters: the automatic System 1 and the effortful System 2.”

In my view, two neural systems battle to control the single output channel of behavior (behavior includes speaking). If this sounds like System 1 and System 2 are equal in efficiency and power, this is not true in any way. My inner power or System 1 is the driver of the car. It is capable, effortless, efficient, fast, brilliant, automatic, spontaneous, responsive and outside the radar of the conscious mind. System 2, on the other hand, is slow, reactive, mechanical, effortful, cognitive and acts under the illusion that it is the driver of the car. When System 2 interferes in the work of System 1, it’s like there are suddenly two sets of hands on the steering wheel, pulling in different directions, and the mixed messages to the body cancel each other out, which means “stuckness.” We can’t go anywhere.

If you’re floundering right now in your journey, it’s likely that you’ve become a micro-manager of your speech rather than trusting the power of your natural automatic spontaneous body to take you where you need to go. I found that when I am not focused on words at all....either the words I’m going to say or how I’m going to say them...the flow is there.

THE AMAZING EFFORTLESS SYSTEM THAT MANAGES THE SPEECH PROCESS IS BASIC TO THE PHILOSOPHY OF SPEECH IS A RIVER. I refer to this as the “inner power” or the Unconscious or Big Me or System 1. Indeed, the main point of SPEECH IS A RIVER is to inform you of the amazing unconscious automatic system that manages the speech process. Everything (including the fact that speech is best left on auto-pilot) is rooted in scientific facts surrounding the automatic nature of the body (which includes brain, nervous system, etc.)

Speech feels so effortless that it's hard to appreciate the effort the brain exerts to construct it. This feeling of effortlessness is rooted in the automatic nature of the brain. The idea of "speech on auto-pilot" would be unthinkable if it wasn't for the fact that the brain automates speech. So, one of the great take-aways in brain science today is the AUTOMATIC NATURE OF THE BRAIN.

"The amounts of 'processing power', attention and effort a process requires is the primary factor used to determine whether it's a controlled or an automatic process. An automatic process is capable of occurring without the need for attention, and the awareness of the initiation or operation of the process, and without drawing upon general processing resources of interfering with other concurrent thought process." (Bargh, John; James S. Uleman. UNINTENDED THOUGHT. Guilford Publications.

Of course we know that the way speech or sight or hearing or walking happens is so automatic and complex, so many events happening at the same moment, that it simply can't be handled by the effortful, trying, pushing, forcing, thinking, planning mind....for the simple reason that the mind can handle only one or two or at the most *three* things at a time. But, unbelievably, the mind takes credit for what System 1 does even though there is no doubt that, as Eagleman writes: "Your consciousness is like a tiny stowaway on a transatlantic steamship taking credit for the journey without acknowledging the massive engineering underfoot."

If we think this gives a negative image of System 2, I should add that while it is true that System 2 may not *intend* to resist the natural flow of speech, the fact is that mind thinks it is there to protect me from harm. When we stutter, it is possible that the mind tries to keep this from happening by constantly chattering instructions ("You should take a deep breath, you need to try harder, you need to look at the person you are talking to, please try to relax, etc.") not realizing that the flow is held back at that point of interference.

"The conscious you, the I that flickers to life when you wake up in the morning, is the smallest bit of what's transpiring in your brain. Although we are dependent on the functioning of the brain for our inner lives, it runs its own show. Most of its operations are outside the security clearance of the conscious mind and the conscious mind simply has no right of entry."

"Consciousness is the smallest player in the operations of the brain. Our brains run on autopilot and the conscious mind has little access to the giant and mysterious factory that runs below it."

The Unconscious can speak without taking thought, spontaneously, automatically. This is a natural automatic process of learning and performing waiting to show us what it can do when allowed to operate without interference.

Latest scientific advances confirm the basic tenet of speech-on-autopilot: "The complexity of speech from the scientist's point of view, is part of our biological birthright; it is not something that parents teach their children or something that must be elaborated in school." Oscar Wilde's famous statement turns out to be true: "Education is an admirable thing, but it is well to remember that nothing that is worth knowing can be taught."

Languages have to be learned but "speech is an instinct, which means we have an instinctive tendency to speak, as we see in the babble of young children; while no child has an instinctive tendency to brew, bake or write. Moreover, no philologist now supposes that any language has

been deliberately invented: it has been slowly and unconsciously developed through time by many steps.” Daniel Pinker in THE LANGUAGE INSTINCT

My stuttering went away as I learned to trust the instinctual process that happens without my conscious thought and effort. Since speech is both automatic and instinctual, it gave me the basis for an amazing experiment I called “the trust experiment.” At the core of the experiment is a single statement: "Language is instinctual and therefore it is NOT necessary for the mind to produce it, control it, monitor it, judge it, try to change it, or regulate it.”

It didn't help me to deal with only one problematic belief or behavior at a time. I had to deal with my mind as a whole, the way my mind wanted to take credit and take control for work it had nothing to do with. But the most important thing was that “Big Me” had to get back in the driver's seat. When that happened, relaxation occurred, as my mind simply sat in the passenger seat and went along for the ride. That is when permanent change happened in my speech. I simply stopped forcing words and observed the flow (as speech happened on its own without my mind interfering, controlling or resisting.) Note that flow is not something I am DOING but something that is happening by itself. The flow was simply there....I wasn't *making* words happen. I was *letting* them happen. I was just conscious that the flow was there.... a gift of nature. “Nature does all things perfectly unless we interfere” turned out to be true.

Doing and Thinking are two different processes, done by two different systems and as we know, thinking is often a lazy substitute for doing. Natural fluency is a lot like breathing....when I breathe I am engaged in the work of breathing in, breathing out. I am *doing* it. I am not *thinking* about doing it. Or thinking about *how* to do it. I'm just doing it. That's all. Just breathing in, breathing out. I'm not thinking about it. I'm not thinking “Wow! I am getting good at this!” or “I'm getting better and better at breathing in, breathing out.” Breathing is simply instinctive and natural, just as speech had been for me before I started to stutter.

Comment: I refer to breathing and speaking as “unconscious” not because I am in a coma....but because I am not conscious of what I am doing. It is being done for me but not by my effortful mind.

My view of “speech as a river that flows spontaneously and automatically when I get resistance out of the way” is constantly confirmed by the latest scientific books, articles, journals, etc., just as it was confirmed by my own experience. As stuttering automatically dropped off, it occurred to me that my body (which includes my brain and motor system) is doing all the right things for natural fluency to occur and I don't even have to think about doing those things. The proof, as we have often been told, is always in the pudding.

A few of the books and articles of confirmation:

THE BRAIN, by David Eagleman;

THINKING FAST AND SLOW by Daniel Kahneman;

BRAIN PLASTICITY (Experiential brain research), Novich and Eagleman;

INCOGNITO by David Eagleman;

THE LANGUAGE INSTINCT by Steven Pinker;

THE TEENAGE BRAIN AND INCREASED SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS in “Psychological Science”;

THE QUEST FOR CONSCIOUSNESS, by C. Koch.

UNINTENDED THOUGHT by Bargh and Uleman

THE AUTOMATIC BRAIN, YouTube. Video created in Europe on the nature of the brain.

QUESTION 9

How do you view your considerable contribution to stuttering? How do you think your work and your contribution differs from other authors who have devoted themselves to stuttering? In other words, what would you like us to retain from your considerable contribution?

To overcome stuttering was the achievement of a lifetime for me. Speech was far too complex for my conscious mind to handle and I found great joy in the discovery that I am free from the unbearable hardship that “trying to speak” put on me.

There is one main purpose I have as I write: What I’m saying has to make sense to me and center around certain principles that I actually “get” because they work in other areas of my life also. Being a Pragmatist, I always experience everything many times over before I actually believe it to be true. And then, over a lifetime, I come to certain conclusions that I trust implicitly because they work. I’m not saying therapists don’t have answers to stuttering but what they taught me was so fuzzy that I always left the clinic with the attitude: “What did the nice lady say?” It was a little like going to the doctor with a problem and he says “I want you to meditate two hours a day, do jumping-jacks three hours a day, avoid processed food, stop worrying, take vitamins and don’t forget to spend an hour outdoors every day.” It boggled my mind because there was no glue to hold it all together.

My time dealing with stuttering was extremely limited for many years but I have corresponded with PWS as often as possible and will do anything I can to help them achieve the same freedom I achieved. I view my contribution to stuttering as simply my charity, done freely and without charge.

Something that makes my day is to hear from a stutterer who has been unable, for whatever reason, to become truly AWARE that speech is a river. Just recently I listened to two “kids” I truly believed could never come to trust their own effortless unconscious processes. In both cases, they suddenly came to the insight, accidentally and on their own, that their brain is their friend and speech truly is a river. That kind of news makes me happy all day long.

QUESTION 10

Your book has many quotes, but which one is your favorite quote, related or not, to stuttering? And why this choice?

“There are two main paths through stuttering: the natural spontaneous flowing no-think, no-try path...and the effortful, full-of-thought-and-effort conscious pathway. The no-try pathway is natural, spontaneous and free. It is vibrant, joyful and edgy. The old path is planned, rigid, reactive and goal-oriented. It is fearful, defensive and ossified (with work, practice, planning, techniques, effort and willpower as priorities to push me over the top.)

“I’m going to take that back about only two paths through stuttering. There is the natural path (the path less-travelled) and the traditional path, that’s true. There is also the passive option: sweetly

but passively waiting for stuttering to get over with, like waiting for a kidney stone to pass. Many people confuse passivity with spontaneity, but there's all the difference in the world. The path I took finally determined my recovery.”

I like that. It still pretty well sums it up for me.

QUESTION 11

Your work being very important for the stuttering community, do you allow me to come back to you in the coming months to carry on this interview?

Yes, of course. I appreciate your interest.

Thanks for giving me this opportunity, Lionel. I have enjoyed it. Since you expressed an interest in websites, etc.....I created a website offering books or parts of books to people who stutter, free of charge. Richard Parent and I are joint owners of this website so if you have suggestions, let either of us know. www.freestutteringbooks.com

And the Stuttering Just Dies

by Kenny Macheka

What would it be like to simply forget that you stuttered?

Regardless of your levels of fluency, regardless of how much you stuttered here or there, stuttering just wasn't on your mind? You barely realize it's even there. You're simply floating through each second of life, content to handle each second as it arises, always moving on.

Such a life is possible.

If you're reading this, chances are you've already come across the 1982 article by Jack Meneer titled "And the Stuttering Just Dies". You may have read this in John Harrison's landmark book *Redefining Stuttering* or elsewhere. If you haven't read it, do take a look so the rest of this makes more sense.

I didn't fully grasp the article and how to apply it to day-to-day-life until I was fortunate enough to discover Jack's email and quiz him on his method. I've been a student of the method ever since, abandoning all the various forms of speech controls and ways of thinking about stuttering I used to cling onto. I thought it would be a good idea to share some of my thoughts and understandings of this method.

At its root, there are two things which drive stuttering that I'll elaborate later: *anticipation and control*. When you learn to see stuttering in terms of anticipation and control, you have the foundation to gain a complete understanding of what's going on.

The experiences going on in the heads of people who stutter, regardless of whether they're using tricks or speech techniques to not stutter, and fluent speakers are radically different. When a fluent speaker speaks, very rarely do they know what they're going to say. They think in terms of *ideas*, *images* and the *thoughts* they are trying to convey. Not *how* they're going to say it. The words literally just come out by themselves without their conscious control. And yet for people who stutter, this is usually not the case. More often than not, they try to decide the words which come out of their mouth, not realizing this is an inefficient and wrong way of speaking. This is the first root cause of stuttering. Control.

The second experience fluent speakers don't have in their minds is the anticipation of stuttering. This is the feeling and idea you're going to stutter. Be it in the next second, in a minute, tomorrow, next month, next year, whenever. This may sound obvious, but you'll soon realize how powerful knowledge of this is.

If you're a person who stutters and you're doubting any of this, I can bet that you often know when you're going to stutter. And more often than not, some or all of the words you're going to stutter on too. That's exactly anticipation and control.

What's interesting is how both behaviors sustain themselves in a vicious circle. The more you anticipate stuttering, the more you try to control your speech, and hence the more you stutter. Even when you don't stutter, you still have those habits in your head and stuttering is ever present within you, regardless of what others may observe.

What would happen if you were able to free yourself from these mental habits of anticipation and control?

Sure, you might still stutter since it has built up to be a neurological habit over time. But you certainly wouldn't be thinking of stuttering as much, and neither would you be trying to control every word which would be coming out of your mouth. As such, you'd be thinking the way a fluent speaker does. You'd be freeing up the speaking processes in your brain to speak without your constant conscious interference.

As a result, the habits which created stuttering are no longer there. And like any behavior which ceases to be reinforced by its root causes, the stuttering will slowly die out!

You'll get effortless speaking, not dependent on any kinds of tricks or speech techniques. Because you've gotten to the root of the stuttering mental habits, this is permanent. No need to worry about relapses (doing so would mean going back to old ways of thinking), no need to ever worry about your speech or think in terms of "damn these kinds of words really gives me trouble". Free to live life as you were meant to, no longer shackled by old illusions.

This is the crux of Jack Menear's article. Let go of the anticipative and control-oriented way of thinking about speech, and the stuttering will die out.

The overarching theme of the article which isn't explicitly highlighted is *mindfulness*. This is being aware of where our attention is. If we turn our attention away from thoughts that create stuttering, then those thoughts will crop up less and less. This is fundamentally true. The less you actively think about something, then over time, that thought won't come into your mind as much. I can attest to this. I used to get a barrage of thoughts in my head regarding words or situations I might stutter in. But because I learned not to follow these thoughts, they just don't come as often.

I suspect where people may trip up with this method is confusion on what exactly anticipation and control thoughts are, and how to let them go. What you'll soon realize when you embark on this journey, is stuttering is a lifestyle. You'll realize there are lots of other unnecessary mental

habits you've carried throughout your life. Without them, life is a lot more clear, easy and peaceful.

Anticipatory thoughts are literally *any* thoughts about *you* stuttering. It doesn't just have to be when you're about to speak. This could be when you're in the shower, eating your dinner, sitting on the train, anywhere.

Control thoughts are where you verbalise talking to others (i.e. thinking about the words you're going to say). Again, this doesn't have to be while you're speaking or about to speak, but anywhere and anytime these thoughts come into your head. Understanding what these thoughts are and being alert when they happen is important.

I will admit, you may initially find it hard to let go of these anticipation and control thoughts in speaking situations. But if you learn to let go of these thoughts in non-speaking situations, where you may find it a lot easier, then that habit will sustain itself, and you'll start doing the same in speaking situations too. And what reason do you really have to entertain stuttering thoughts when you're in a place like the shower?

OK, so how exactly do we let go of these anticipation and control thoughts? In his article, Jack outlines four steps to take when anticipation and control thoughts come into our mind.

1. Face: do not run. *When anticipation and control thoughts appear, look at them for what they are. Don't suppress them or hide from them; recognize and define them.*
2. Accept: do not fight. *Calmly accept that this unwanted thought has surfaced.*
3. Float past: do not listen in. *The thought is there, but you don't have to control this line of thinking (although you have a habit of continuing it.) Decide to "let it go."*
4. Let time pass: *do not be Impatient with time.*

All of the steps are important and also, be kind to yourself anytime you mess up. Even now after thousands of hours, I wouldn't dare give myself a hard time for accidentally following a stuttering thought. I'd simply move on. As time goes on, these four steps will become reflexive, and you'll rarely have to actively think about them.

It's steps 3 and 4 which I think need a bit of explanation. You let go of a thought by not actively focusing on it. So if you get a thought that you might stutter, you have two options: you could indulge that thought and think about it more and more (e.g. "oh no, imagine the faces of all of the people who'll be there when I stutter"); or you can recognize it for what it is (ie: just a thought) and think about something else. For example, if I were showering and I got a stuttering thought, I would just continue focusing my attention on the shower; if I'm reading I'm focusing my attention on what I'm reading.

Step 4 is mightily important. Sometimes, when you focus your attention away from a stuttering thought, the thought may immediately vanish from your awareness. Other times, it might still remain in your periphery. This is where the *let time pass* comes in. As long as you're not actively focused on that thought and its potential implications, then you're fine. Don't make it your centre. Before you know it, the thought will have disappeared and you'll have forgotten all about it.

NOTE: As a side, anywhere I write "stuttering thought" can apply to either an anticipation or control thought.

When speaking or about to speak, you're probably in the habit of thinking about the words you'll say. Let those thoughts go. Focus on *what* you're trying to convey (the *ideas, images* and *concepts*) not *how* you're going to say it. For example, if you're telling a story, visualise it in your head and the words will just produce themselves.

Stuttering thoughts will come, but don't make them your center. It's a complete illusion that you have to say something a certain way because it appeared that way in your head. You may find this controversial at first, but don't even worry about avoiding words because you felt you would stutter on them. The fluent version of you would very rarely think about words when speaking in the first place.

When you're not speaking but conversing with others, learn to really be in the conversation. You may have something you want to say (be it an add-on to what someone's saying, or something completely different). Make a note of it and then stay with the conversation, moving second to second and giving the other person your full attention. Your responses will be spontaneous and timely, not obsessively planned out as you may be in the habit of. This will take some time so be kind to yourself.

When you stutter, move on. Thinking about a past stuttering event, even if it was just a moment ago, is just another stuttering thought. We let go of the thoughts as outlined before.

On the flip side, and this is hugely important, when you are fluent, don't pay too much attention to it. You may feel some pride or good feelings associated with fluency. Don't indulge in them. Move forward with what you are saying. And once you've finished speaking, move on.

Do not congratulate yourself for fluency. If you do, you're following a stuttering thought, because that congratulation comes from you comparing your fluency to stuttering. Fluent speakers don't congratulate themselves for fluency and neither should you. Learning to move on once you've finished speaking, no matter the outcome, is crucial.

To build ease with letting go of stuttering thoughts, you ought to build up the habit of living second to second. Living in the present as some would call it. When you're eating, you're focusing on the eating and the food; when you're showering, you're focusing on the shower;

when you're working on a problem you're focusing on the problem; when you're watching a film, you're focused on that film.

Any other thoughts which come into your mind, regardless of whether they're stuttering thoughts or any other kind of thoughts, are just thoughts. If they're immediately important (e.g. "I think I left my oven on for too long"), feel free to address them. Otherwise, let them go and return to what you're currently doing. You'll do this hundreds of times throughout the day. That's okay. By learning not to associate with every thought that comes into your head, you'll not only break free of the stuttering mind, but also of the illusion that you are your thoughts. When you're thrown into situations that would have stressed you out before, you won't regret the fact that you now know how to stay present and let go of unwanted thoughts. Expanding your understanding of mindfulness will go a long way.

One useful way I found of staying present throughout the day was to always be gently aware of my breath. When unwanted thoughts came I could just focus on my breath and then return my attention to what I really wanted to focus on. You don't have to do this, but you may find it useful.

Life is peaceful now. It's not just stuttering I'm no longer preoccupied with. Negative thoughts in general no longer have a hold on me, and I've realized we can appreciate and enjoy each second of life just as it is and just as we are.

This method is the most effortless and relatively pain-free way out of stuttering. You get out of stuttering by literally not focusing on stuttering. This I can attest to. I would put gigantic efforts into speaking. Now I've realized I don't need to do that, and I'm free to dedicate my limited time and resources to other things while getting better results in my speech than I ever would have through actively working on it.

Don't feel under any pressure to try this method. If what you have is working for you, great! If you'd rather try something else, go ahead! Perhaps you'll come back to these ideas some other time.

If you embark on this journey, enjoy it. Give yourself as much time as you need to understand these ideas, before and after you take them on. When I took on this method, I would spend some time in the morning and evening thinking things through. Any other time in the day was spent towards living my life, and I would let go of any thoughts to do with stuttering. Eventually this just became the way I lived, and I rarely have to think about what I'm doing.

But I would caution you: if you're used to using tricks or certain speech techniques, you'll have to give all of these up. They only reinforce the anticipation and control thoughts that create stuttering and are unlikely to work with this method. As a result, you may stutter a lot more for a while. But if stuttering occupies your mind less and less you're on the right track, and effortless fluency will slowly reveal itself.

The Elusive Within Reach

by Inge van der Reijden

When I don't consciously think of speaking, it is just there. It is a feeling of being whole, of letting your thoughts flow the moment they enter your head, without an internal judge standing there criticizing you. How do I make that happen? Why is this so elusive?

Where is the off-button to silence this judge?

I used to think everyone was better than I was. When you don't stutter, people listen to you and your words count. Stuttering, however, is labeled as "being uncertain and weak", the "not playing for real" syndrome.

I thought that, if I didn't stutter, I would be strong and afraid of no one. As I was once told I was, I wouldn't be sitting in that glass house that could be thrown in at the moment I retorted and spoke up for myself. If I didn't stutter, I would be able to defend myself, because the way the words came out would not be an excuse to not listen to what I had to say. Then I would be someone, worth listening to, whose opinion mattered.

I often didn't understand what people who don't stutter worried about. After all, they didn't stutter. Of course, this is a wrong way of seeing it, as everyone has his or her own issues to deal with.

But speech is so essential...

Stuttering was something bad and linked to my feeling of self-esteem. The more I stuttered, the more I seemed to block and the smaller I became. This internal judge was very mean; no need for others to do that. It was a simple fact: a stuttering child was inferior to others.

What helped create this idea?

In the 60's there was a series for children on Dutch television in which some of the characters stuttered. They were meant to be laughed at, portrayed as stupid, neurotic and too stupid to be taken seriously. And there I was, the stuttering child, watching this image of the stupid stuttrer thrown into the living room by grown-ups and "grown-ups were always right". Television was a powerful medium in those days. This severely disrupted the development of a positive image of myself.

The character of Brains from the series *Thunderbirds* was an exception to the rule. Yes, he stuttered, but he was very smart **and** was taken seriously. He was entombed in sand by villains, only his head sticking out, haunted me for a long time.

What an effect a puppet series on TV can have on a child's emotional life and the impact it can have when a person who stutters in kid series is portrayed as a laughing stock of all. The spirit of the 60's had a lasting impact on my youth.

In those years therapy basically meant accepting your fate. There was a photo in the newspaper of a group of people, standing in a circle and having to shout "I am a stutterer". Later buttons were added with the texts like "I stutter... so what?", "doyoustutterordolstutter" or "I stutter, what are *you* good at?" Wearing such a button was the pinnacle of acceptance. Acceptance was the key word, as stuttering was "a defect of the brain" according to the professors. By simply practicing hard and doing your utmost those difficult letters could be mastered.

This was all very confusing to me because I knew that my natural state was free of blocking/stuttering. I could read beautifully aloud when I was alone and I told my cat long stories without any stuttering. However, there was an E for reading aloud in my school report and the cat sadly died. And just because I was trying so hard not to stutter, my anxiety grew and grew. Being able to accept the very thing that caused me so much pain and embodied so much negativity would have been a true miracle indeed!

Two tracks

The piercing bell denoted the end of the lesson. We left and hurried to the classroom for a double period of English. The teacher explained to us what to do. Each cubicle had a set of headphones that we had to put on. First, we would hear a story; then we had to give answers in spoken English to the story. Via a switchboard the teacher could listen in at random to his pupils.

I put on the headphones and listened to the story. Without having to think about how the words would form in my mouth, functioning on my automatic pilot, answering the questions in English went effortlessly. And then I heard the click and knew my teacher was listening to me. My breath halted and my controlling consciousness took over. Now I had to speak without stuttering! I locked and couldn't produce a single sound. The teacher frowned at me and switched to another pupil.

What had happened to me? From easy spontaneous speech I had switched to forced speech for which I had to put in an enormous effort, with the opposite result. The thought of having to speak flawlessly had put me on the wrong track.



The teacher switched to my cubicle a number of times but each time I blocked the moment I heard the click. What must he have thought of me? He saw me speaking effortlessly but the moment he tuned in I couldn't produce a sound.

It was that teacher who took my fate to heart. Later in the schoolyear he gave me an article by Charles van Riper. However, this lacked the necessary tools and it was no use to me. The speech therapy lessons that I took then focused on becoming conscious of the mechanisms of speech, which worked counter-productive for me. I had convinced myself that spontaneous speech was not ok, for then my stuttering was not under my control. Spontaneous speech was useless ...

The focus was on speaking flawlessly and my conclusion was that speaking is difficult and very hard work: breathe correctly, use your voice consciously, use your all muscles at the same time at the right moment, form the words in your mouth, look at the people you are talking to, but not for too long otherwise it is unnatural... all spontaneity gone, replaced by fear of failure. Result: a forced way of speaking forged by my own willpower without any room for myself. Doomed to fail because you are not fit to carry out such a task consciously.

This view put me on the wrong track for a long time.

The memory of the lesson with the teacher listening in to me speaking English has always stayed with me as the clearest example of me switching from spontaneous to forced speech.

But where was the switch to turn off my fears and let go of control?

While reading John Harrison's book *Redefining Stuttering*, everything seemed to fall into place. At last, I had found what I had been looking for all those years, how I had felt for all those years. *The elusive caught in words*. Explained. Complete recognition and acknowledgement at last.

All of a sudden, I was freed of my inferiority complex, my feeling of not being good enough. My self-esteem was disconnected from my blocking and stuttering.

Stuttering was explained as being the result of self-limiting beliefs and perceptions. At last, I read what I had always felt but had not been able to put into words in its entirety. Now I understood what had been my problem and how that had manifested itself. *I didn't just stutter but I blocked myself.*

This was never discussed in the speech therapy classes and stuttering therapies that I had followed through my life.

John Harrison replaced the word stuttering by "holding back". This is something I recognize completely. The severe blocking in me started to decrease. My enormous feeling of guilt of still stuttering despite all the speech and stuttering therapies disappeared, and I started to look at myself in a different way. I was milder and more friendly to myself.

But not only did I feel freed; all my pain, frustration, fear and traumas emerged in full force too. All skeletons fell out of the cupboard, all the suppressed emotions of pain and misery. I had to deal with them one by one and give them a place. In Ruth Mead's words, "cleaning the canals", and that's how it felt. All "shit" had to be cleaned out with a sharp brush, leaving my soul raw. Everything seemed to be shifting because now I looked at everything from a different perspective, one of being a worthy person too and the way you speak doesn't diminish that at all. Stuttering had lost its paralyzing grip on my feeling of self-esteem but besides feelings of misery, frustration, fear and traumas I felt *furious*.

Always having to conform myself to a society where stuttering is seen as bad. I have felt ashamed not only of my stuttering, but also of the treatment people who stutter were exposed to.

I wanted to explain to everybody why I had felt so inferior. At last, I could explain why I had felt that way, but my head hit a wall of incomprehension and ignorance. *That was the most difficult hurdle to take and it cost me years to accept that.*

Himmelhoch jauchzend, zum Tode betrübt... from over the moon to the darkest depression.

The blocking in me had disappeared but I myself was adrift. The protective wall that I had built around me as a child had gone and I felt vulnerable, anxious to make mistakes and being unseemly, now not for how I spoke but for who I was. My holding back was gone but I had to learn the skills to keep myself going without it.

On the one hand, I was freed and was shouting my sense of freedom from the rooftops, on the other hand all my (false) certainties had disappeared.

It has been a long process but I have slain most dragons, a true battle, dragons of traumatic experiences and restraining convictions developed when I was a child. Dragged up, held to the light and seen for what they were. Many of these had gone deep into the unconsciousness and were hard to dig up: having believed in them for so long had made them so true.

I read and learned so much that made me look at stuttering and blocking in a different way.

I needed to follow another track. However, the conviction that I had to do something to speak 'well' was firmly embedded in me. My brain is geared for controlling speech. Letting go of that, feels uncomfortable. It felt as if I had to let go of every straw that I clung to, all remnants of speech techniques that I had mastered and that had become part and parcel of the way I spoke. I had to get rid of the control panel, like stepping out of the cockpit. And, basically, that was exactly what it was like.

Stuttering stems from an underlying unnaturally functioning speech production system. Fluency stems from a naturally functioning speech production system. Two different tracks. Trying not to stutter causes anxiety and powerful restraint on self-expression.

Everyone who stutters has learned to speak like everyone else; language is lodged in the brain. Speech is an unconscious process. It is simply there. Ask anyone who doesn't stutter what he/she does to be able to speak and the answer will be "nothing". The ability to speak is simply there. Ask that same person to consciously think about that process and his/her fluency will disappear. The brain will start monitoring.

Learning to trust in the natural process is the road to travel.

This is hard work, not trying to speak 'flawlessly' but to become conscious of the natural process of speaking: overcoming speaking in 'words', overcoming planning and anticipating, putting your focus on something else and especially letting go of wanting to control your speech. Instead, concentrate on your way of thinking. What do you say to yourself? Be conscious of the power of your mind over speech. "Clean the canals so that the river can flow".

And tell yourself over and over again that the way you speak is nothing to be ashamed of...

Training this, the becoming conscious of the natural process of speech is the roadmap which your brain learns to trust again. It is already all there.

"We do not let go of control; we let go of the belief that we have control. The rest is grace." – David Richo

People wondered why stuttering had such a prominent place in my life. That was only a part of a bigger whole?

The impact that stuttering has had on me and how that has defined me is difficult to understand for an outsider. And, actually it is a shame that it can be hidden to a certain extent. To hide it, you just don't say anything and remain silent, and only say something when you're absolutely sure you can say that without stuttering. In that respect stuttering differs from being wheelchair bound. Because you can't pretend to walk for a while, cannot adopt a false image, pretending to be 'normal'; there is no fear of being exposed for it is clear for everyone to see and needs no explaining.

As I said before, after reading *Redefining Stuttering* the most serious blocking in me had disappeared. Speaking became easier because stuttering didn't define my feeling of self-esteem anymore. I had found myself again and could look at myself from a distance and see what its impact had been, how it had had a negative influence on my relationships with others, especially during my childhood. I hadn't dared to be myself because the way I expressed myself was no good at all.

"You have no identity" someone once said to me. This remark in particular cut to the bone during my teens because it hits the nail on the head. My identity was hidden, suppressed to protect myself, for the way my words came out was strange and imperfect. It embarrassed others in my presence. It had left its mark on me. I did everything not to stutter, which resulted in holding back. It was a vicious circle: the more I tried not to stutter, the more fear I felt, and the more blocked I was. So much so, that I didn't dare to talk anymore in an environment that felt unsafe and intolerant.

Fortunately, all these negative experiences are balanced by many good ones, such as speaking without any impediments in certain situations: with my girlfriends, when being on my own, telling stories to our cat. I could also speak freely and fluently when talking to little children, singing, or playing a role in school plays.

Being highly sensitive will undoubtedly have played a part in it all and it is good to pay attention to what impact this trait has had and has on my life. Once I knew, so much came in another perspective and now I understand myself so much better. Everything that happens enters my brain in an unfiltered way, I take everything literally and I also look at all sides, also from the other person's perspective. I can't switch off my antennas.

Being highly sensitive makes life sometimes very complicated. I realize more and more that the brain of a highly sensitive person does function differently. Being overwhelmed by this massive input of information is often confusing also what your brain digs up by itself.

Now I can feel compassion for the child I was; a child said to be difficult, crying easily, a child that was often overwhelmed by emotions she couldn't handle. A child that often felt misunderstood and couldn't stop others overstepping her limits. A child shouldering other people's problems, thinking they were hers and thinking she was to blame. A child without the adult's overview to put it in perspective. Very much a worried child, always anticipating. The odd one out.

The word "stutter" has lost its grip on me. My heart doesn't pound when the word is mentioned or when someone makes a joke about it.

But sometimes I am in a situation in which the feeling of inferiority suddenly is back again. Then I am very conscious of myself and I am afraid of making mistakes. The fear of being laughed at and failing is very prominent then. This happens when for instance I am seated in a lower position, when someone frowns at me or feels uncomfortable in my presence. I then feel rejected for who I am, not good enough, worthless. Fortunately, I recognize the mechanism but when it happens I feel like I used to feel, at a dead end again.

The times when I was scanning the books in the psychology section of in the library for the word stuttering, hoping to find new helpful information, are over. Gone is this continuous quest; I have lost the skill of scanning the page for the word stuttering.

John Harrison's book *Redefining Stuttering* has completely changed my life. The problem that dominated my entire life was reduced to a number of small problems I could deal with. I am very grateful to him. *His insights, all bound in this classic which everyone who stutters should read.*

I started on this new road with an open mind and have developed myself by reading a lot, taking courses among other things on NLP, voice expression and Mindworks. And above all I have enjoyed my broader understanding and look on the world.

My fear of speaking is greatly reduced because my feeling of self-esteem doesn't depend on it anymore. During a course in which you had to overstep your own boundaries, I learned that, when I showed inappropriate behavior (what stuttering is considered to be), I felt the same fear again, even though speaking was not involved. An eyeopener.

Like the time I did the assignment of 15 push-ups in a crowded square in Amsterdam and 15 triple jumps in a busy street. The next day 20 squats on the funfair without sneakers (to make it more appropriate) but a shopping bag on my arm ... Fortunately, I didn't bump into any people I knew. I am sure they would have thought I had indeed gone mental ... and should go and see a doctor.

My heart was in my throat. It was exactly the same as when I had to talk and knew for certain that I would block. When I had to read aloud a self-made poem to a crowded outdoor café, I didn't experience fear of speaking but the fear of another kind. All this while I thought I could face the world fearless once I didn't stutter anymore. Then I realized that everyone feels fear when having to do something outside one's comfort zone.

The mistake I made was that I regarded others, who didn't stutter, superior to me. Thus, I thought they had better skills, only because they didn't stutter.

Those exercises, that forced me to go outside my comfort zone, were crucial to reach this insight.

What provoked stuttering does not matter, but only finding out what keeps you stuttering can change the situation.

And where do you go from here?

I looked for a coach who could help me on this new road.

Barbara Dahm is an unconventional speech therapist who has developed a therapy that is completely the opposite of treatment of just symptoms.

Her treatment is broad and diverse and differs in that sense from the speech-and stuttering therapies that I followed in the past. Trying to speak fluently by means of a speech technique means that you expect new results from a system that still works in the old way. In fact, that is the worst you can do to yourself.

Barbara doesn't treat symptoms. The focus is on the natural way the speech mechanism works, unlearn the habit to take control over it and use this as your standard approach. Her course exists of a broad approach in which John Harrison's hexagon is discussed but in which is also explained how natural speech works without focusing on the technical side of it. It encompasses all aspects to change the thought and control pattern that keeps stuttering alive. It is unnecessary to focus on the technical aspects. To be able to walk doesn't mean that you have to know what muscles work simultaneously. The brain coordinates it without you being conscious of it. It is simply there.

A structured course like Barbara Dahm's embodies for me everything I have been working on these past years. All my doubts have disappeared. All the questions that were bothering me have been answered; Barbara has taken the sting out of terrible remarks from the past like "obviously you haven't suffered enough yet, otherwise you would use your speech techniques better".

Despite the strong headwinds I experienced, I have never lost belief in myself. No matter how much I didn't understand the treatment of stuttering in the past, I have always had the strength to pull myself out of the dark pit. For if you lose belief in yourself, what is left...?

I am the proud mother of two fantastic and beautiful daughters who have developed into empathic, strong women. I am the proud grandmother of 4 wonderful grandchildren whom I enjoy immensely. And last, but not least, there is my husband, through thick and thin.

I can't get back my younger years, obsessed by stuttering, but life is wonderful and I'm grateful for who I really am and always have been.

How simple it can really be if you allow yourself to stutter and you don't put a value judgment on it.

.....*What the struggle to speak is really all about*

Inge van der Reijden

The Netherlands

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How Chronic Stuttering Evolves

by John C. Harrison

A few weeks ago, I celebrated another birthday.

“Hey John, how many is that now?” you ask.

“Oh god, so many that I’ve lost count,” I reply. “A lot of years, more than 85” is all I’m willing to admit to.

But it’s true. Most of my old friends are no longer around. Yet here I am. And I tell you it’s a different landscape. When you reach your very senior years, you get to experience things in new ways. For one thing, unless you’ve been working out assiduously (I haven’t), your body doesn’t recover quite the same way. Neither does your mind. Things that you thought you knew, you don’t. At least not in the same fashion. And things that all your life you could do with little thought now require more self-awareness.

I grew up as a bright though overly sensitive kid. I had really nice parents; however, they were very human. My mother was something of a perfectionist. There was always a right way to do things. My father was a businessman and success driven. Both were performance oriented. Things had to look good.

One thing that didn’t look good was my early disfluency which started at the age of two and a half after my mother returned from a European vacation. So at the ripe age of four and a half they took me to the National Hospital for Speech and Hearing Disorders in New York City to see about my speech difficulties.

Although the institute ran me through all kinds of tests, not much came of the visit. But the staff did observe that I seemed to have more disfluencies in the presence of my mother. By the age of seven, that disfluency had evolved into a speech block that showed up whenever I found myself called upon to perform.

Now move ahead 82 years.

I go to the fridge to pour myself a tall glass of orange juice. I pick up the heavy round glass container of juice in my right hand and the glass in my left. Then suddenly I have a glancing thought that I might drop the heavy container if I’m not careful. That thought hadn’t ever occurred to me a few years ago. But now it does, perhaps because I’m not as strong as I used to be. And for a moment it’s all that I can picture.

Then I have a fleeting image of actually missing the glass with the pitcher and pouring some of the juice on the floor. Have I ever actually spilled the juice? Nope. But I’m aware that we tend to do what our mind pictures. And if the fear and the picture it engenders is intense enough, my automatic control system might decide that this is what I want to do and then make it happen.

Sounds stupid, doesn’t it.

But through the years I discovered that this is how my mind is set up. So if I want to ensure that it doesn't happen, I have to make certain that I continually stay aware...*and then always picture what I WANT to have happen*, rather than what I'm afraid *might* happen.

These are precisely the issues involved in chronic stuttering and blocking.

In an earlier article, I talked about the two biological control systems that govern our life: one conscious and one automatic. The automatic control system is set up by our body to relieve our conscious mind from having to deal with overload. It does this by pushing frequently used processes and routines into our subconscious where they are managed without our conscious awareness.

Normally, this works very well. You deal with new problems, issues and tasks with the full power and attention of your conscious mind while the routine tasks are relegated to a background control operation. But with chronic stuttering and blocking the whole system goes awry. Why is this so?

It has a lot to do with the individual's personality. If you have issues around self-assertion...if you're easily hurt because you're highly sensitive (over 85% of people who block and stutter are vs. just 25% of the general population)...if you have fears of possibly looking too aggressive or being wrong or not perfect enough or coming off as too demanding...*your unconscious control system* will prompt you to put on the brakes.

It will do this by automatically activating particular responses designed to inhibit the free expression of your emotions. It will cause you to unconsciously tighten your lips, hold your breath, or repeat a word or sound to prevent you from expressing yourself in ways that might get you in trouble. All of this is taking place in the background, outside of your awareness, so that it seems like it is happening *to* you.

Over time, this is what can lead a person to believe that he has become "a stutterer," someone who has a speech problem and who has some physical problem that gets in the way of producing fluent speech.

But as you can see, that's not it at all.

Speaking is more than about speech. It's a full person operation.

New resources

This a great time to be alive if you want to conquer a debilitating stuttering problem. Thanks to the infinite resources of the Internet, you can access a seemingly infinite choice of activities, therapists, books and articles, programs, and more.

Want to practice speaking to a large audience of PWS? You can log onto a Zoom call with people who stutter that's based in New York and that meets every four or five days. To get on their list write awaldman@leeassociates.com. They're one of many such groups on line.

Want to work with a therapist from Russia who came to the U.S., conquered her own stuttering problem, wrote a compelling book on her recovery and now runs workshops for PWS? Look up Anna Margolina and prepare yourself for some intense moments of self-discovery.

Then there's Barbara Dahm, an American SLP based in Israel, who I met in Munich in 1994. Barbara developed Dynamic Stuttering Therapy, a very innovative approach that looks at stuttering as a system issue. Through this program, people who stutter learn to use their speaking system naturally. She has several articles in this book, and works with clients the world over.

I met Chazzler DiCyprian on the Internet almost 20 years ago when he was a student at the University of California in San Diego. Chazzler and I connected right away, and we had some great discussions. When he went back home to Cypress, Chazzler kept exploring his stuttering, and eventually developed his own unique program for overcoming his disability. Chazzler is the founder of Stuttering Dissolution Online Academy, which helps stutters/stammerers to live fully expressive, confident and successful lives. Look him up on the Internet. You'll be impressed by what he has to offer.

I first met Dave McGuire in Munich in the mid 90s and was very impressed with his approach and successes. The McGuire Program is now found in various countries around the world and is well worth checking out. Like any good program, they look at the entire individual and not just his or her speech. And many other speech therapists today are equally adept at following a holistic approach.

If you want to see a very innovative program, check into Stuttering & Anxiety Cures (SAC), the community of ex-stutterers that provides a program built around Lee Lovett's creative and comprehensive stuttering dissolution program. SAC's program offers a number of unusual approaches and techniques, most notably a series of 13 "crutches" the individual can employ to help the PWS keep talking, even though they feel themselves holding back. By using the crutches, the individual avoids stutters and slowly becomes acclimatized to all kinds of speaking situations that once were too scary to ever consider. At some point the individual will discover that the crutches are no longer necessary because he or she has heard enough fluency from his/her lips to develop enough self-confidence to stop holding back. Lee also does personal on-line coaching sessions (at no charge) along with a cadre of trained coaches (all ex-stutterers.) And all coaching sessions are posted on-line (at Speech Anxiety Cures) for anyone to review. You can read and see videos of 150 or so of their Success Stories on *Speech Anxiety Anonymous*.

Oh my lord, these names just scratch the surface. The people I've met in the stuttering world have been the most interesting, creative and heroic group you could ever hope to know. And now that virtually everyone has Internet access, there's no end to the delightful and interesting SLPs, PWSs and programs you can meet in pursuit of answers to your own stuttering-related issues.

So get yourself out there. Have as much fun as possible as you come up with answers to those formerly unsolvable stuttering-related problems.

And discover that when it comes to speaking, there's nothing that you cannot do.