



SHEDDING NEW LIGHT  
ON A CHALLENGING PROBLEM

# REDEFINING STUTTERING

What the struggle to  
speak is *really* all about

2011 EDITION

by **JOHN C. HARRISON**  
National Stuttering Association

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*A Guide  
to Recovery*  
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A Guide to Recovery

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speak is *really* all about

by JOHN C. HARRISON  
*National Stuttering Association*

2011 EDITION

WORDS THAT WORK  
San Francisco

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*Be what you is, cuz if you be what you ain't, you ain't what you is.*

*Grave marker,  
Boot Hill Cemetery,  
Tombstone, Arizona*

*Life goes on, and so must he. From the moment he gives himself up, and to the extent that he does so, all unknowingly he sets about to create and maintain a pseudo-self. But this is a "self" without wishes. He'll go through the motions, not for fun or joy, but for survival; because he has to obey. From now on he will be torn apart by unconscious, compulsive needs or ground by unconscious conflicts into paralysis, every motion and every instant canceling out his being and his integrity; and all the while he is disguised as a normal person and expected to behave like one!*

*G. Allport  
Quoted in Towards a Psychology of Being*

*We are changed by what we do, not by what we think about, or read about, but by what we actually do.*

*Winston Churchill*





In a modern world characterized by incredible social, technological and scientific breakthroughs, chronic stuttering has managed to plod along without any definite answers. It's time we changed that. It's time we made a paradigm shift. This book is an attempt to do just that.





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## FOREWORD

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One summer evening during the early 80s I was sitting in the living room of John Ahlback, then the Executive Director of the National Stuttering Project\*, having a few beers and talking about this and that. It was almost 11 p.m., and we'd just concluded a meeting of the San Francisco NSP chapter. It had been one of those slow evenings where only a few people showed up. In fact, that particular summer our local chapter hadn't been doing too well. Attendance had dwindled down to only four or so each meeting, and sometimes not even that.

It was an intense conversation, because John and I had something in common that had significantly impacted our lives—we both grew up with a chronic stuttering problem. And we were both committed to helping others break out of their stuttering prison.

My dysfluency suddenly appeared when I was three and a half. My mother had gone on a six-week European trip with my grandmother, and when she returned, I took her out to the garden and—so my mother recalls—pointed to a row of petunias and said, “Mommy, look...look...look...look at...at...at...the flowers.”

Chronic stuttering plagued me all the way through my late 20s. I was never a severe stutterer, undoubtedly because I never allowed myself to develop the often bizarre struggle behavior characteristic of those who forcibly try and push through a block. I would simply outwait the block and suffer the long silences.

Nevertheless, being of a sensitive nature, those unexplained long pauses would mortify me. I could talk just fine when I was chatting with friends. But if I had to recite in class or speak to an authority figure or stop a stranger on the street to ask a question, I would often lock right up. Eventually I became a “closet stutterer”—that is, the kind of person who could pass for “normal” but who always feared that at any moment his awful secret would be revealed.

Not much happened to change my stuttering until one day, at the age of 25, I abruptly quit my job at my father's ad agency, boarded a 707, and

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\*In 1999 the board of directors of the National Stuttering Project voted to change the organization's name to the National Stuttering *Association*, since the organization long ago outgrew its identity as a project. Consequently, you will find references to both the NSP and the NSA throughout this edition.

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left New York City for San Francisco. The personal growth movement was just beginning in California in the early 60s, and San Francisco was right at the center of it. In short order, I was involved in various growth activities including encounter groups, 48-hour non-sleep “awareness” marathons, several LSD trips, two years of psychodrama classes, gestalt therapy groups, Toastmasters meetings, and the like. By the time the 60s had drawn to a close, thanks to all this internal probing, I had a much better handle on my inner self.

As a by-product of those self-exploratory activities, my stuttering gradually disappeared. What’s more, I felt I understood things about the essential nature of chronic stuttering that other people—even the professionals—didn’t know. I saw that my speech problem was really an extension of my larger life issues—a system involving my entire self. Although I had seen stuttering as primarily a speech problem, it turned out to really be about my difficulties with the experience of communicating to others. No wonder I never stuttered when I was alone.

But who could I share this with?

I found the answer in 1977 when Bob Goldman and Michael Sugarman, two fellows in their 20s living in nearby Walnut Creek, started the National Stuttering Project, a self-help organization for people who stuttered. Finally, I had a place where I could put my insights to good use. I quickly joined the NSP, eventually became the pro bono associate director, and played an active role in the development of the organization....which was how I ended up in John Ahlback’s living room that evening, trying to figure out how to breathe life into our local NSP chapter.

Groups tend to go through peaks and valleys, and our chapter was definitely in a valley. These undulations are undoubtedly a reflection of many things — group dynamics, schedules, weather, personal initiative, creativity, and what all. Each group has its own chemistry, and that particular summer we seemed to be a lackluster bunch.

As John and I sipped our beers, our conversation drifted to how the other NSP groups were doing. Houston, of course, was our shining light. And Philadelphia and Southern California were also doing well. But there were other chapters that had written to John about attendance problems similar to ours. What could we do to help them?

The most common complaint was a lack of direction and purpose. We did have a standard meeting format we’d written up in a brochure. But even with that, people were feeling that they were doing the same old stuff. That’s when I got the idea to put together a book on public speaking.

Although public speaking had always terrified me, it also held me in its thrall. In my mind’s eye, I could picture myself speaking passionately in front of a crowd. After I joined the National Stuttering Project, fantasy

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became reality. I began to find opportunities to speak in front of others in a nonthreatening environment. I organized and ran my first workshop — a two-day affair no less!—in 1982 for about 15 NSP members. I ran local chapter meetings. Slowly I became more comfortable in the role of speaker. Encouraged by my growing confidence, I started observing other people who were really good speakers. I tried to get inside their skin. What were they feeling? What were they doing? What made them charismatic? What made them confident?

As I talked to John that summer evening, the thought struck me: why not write a manual on public speaking. Eventually, I came up with 10 lessons, each one drawn from another observation I had made about good speakers and the specific things they did. As an afterthought, I also included an essay on overcoming performance fears that I felt directly related to the speaking experience.

The manual was titled *How to Conquer Your Fears of Speaking before People*, and the 50-page first edition was printed on a dot-matrix printer. The manual turned out to be popular with a number of NSP chapters. The exercises were simple, they were easy to use, and chapter members could provide valuable feedback for each other.

Very slowly, news began to dribble in of chapters using the book as a supplement to their regular programs. Feedback was good. People were finding that the information and exercises really helped to lessen the fear of speaking before groups by giving people ways to perceive the speaking situation in a different light. The book also gave them tools and techniques to control the speaking situation to their advantage.

In the two decades that followed I continued to write articles for the NSA's newsletter *Letting GO*, and other publications, and when a piece seemed appropriate for the public speaking book, I included it in the latest edition.

What became apparent over time was that these articles were defining a new way of looking at stuttering and in many cases offered plausible answers to the what and why of stuttering. Eventually, the title of the book was changed to *REDEFINING STUTTERING: What The Struggle to Speak is Really All About*.

The book is organized into eight parts.

Part 1 introduces a new, holistic way of looking at stuttering that provides plausible answers to long-standing questions.

Part 2 explores the stuttering mindset.

Part 3 looks at the influence of perception on stuttering.

Part 4 looks at stuttering and genetics

Part 5 presents various pathways to recovery

Part 6 follows a single PWS through his 3-year recovery process.

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Part 7 contains the original public speaking manual.

Part 8 presents resources for personal growth and change.

I want to thank fellow NSA member Paul Engelman who suggested the new title. I also want to offer a very huge thanks to Richard Parent of Montréal who has produced a French language translation of the book entitled *Redéfinir Le Bégaiement: La vraie nature du Combat pour s'exprimer*. Both the English and French versions are available as free downloads from the Stuttering Home Page at <http://www.mnsu.edu/comdis/kuster/infoaboutstuttering.html#holistically>. A Spanish language translation of an earlier version of the book is available from the Fundación Española de la Tartamudez. Their email address is [fundacionttmes@gmail.com](mailto:fundacionttmes@gmail.com).

I hope this book proves helpful to anyone who wants to take the fear out of speaking and who wants to better understand what chronic stuttering and blocking are *really* all about.

John C. Harrison

San Francisco

August 2011



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## PREFACE

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### What is stuttering *really* all about?

Why can't I speak? Why are my words getting stuck? Why can I talk when I'm alone, but not when I'm with others?

It's totally maddening.

Throughout the millennia, chronic stuttering has been one of the most mysterious, confusing, confounding and seemingly unsolvable puzzles. Stuttering has been blamed on childhood trauma, sibling rivalry, suppressed anger, infantile sexual infatuation, deformations of the tongue, lips, palate, jaw, or larynx, chemical imbalance, strict upbringing, vicious habit, guilt, approach-avoidance conflicts and more

Stuttering has been addressed by medical doctors, psychologists, philosophers, behaviorists, semanticists, geneticists, speech-language clinicians and researchers, and yes, quite a few charlatans as well. Yet, after being the focus of so much brainpower and so much pain and suffering throughout so many centuries, it's amazing that we haven't been able to arrive at consensus on the essential nature of chronic stuttering and what drives it.

We have, however, not suffered a shortage of theories.

You've probably heard of Demosthenes, a renowned debater in Athens, Greece in 384 B.C., who grew up with a stutter and spent a sheltered and lonely childhood immersed in books.

Despite his stutter, Demosthenes was driven by ambition and attracted to public life, and nothing...*nothing!*...was going to stand in his way, not even his halting speech. To build a strong voice, he stood on the shore and practiced speaking with pebbles in his mouths until he could be heard above the roar of the waves. He also climbed hills with weights hanging from his chest to build his lung power.

But for every Demosthenes, there have been hundreds of long-suffering individuals who have shied away from public discourse, or have suffered public humiliation, or lived in terror that their "secret" would be revealed.

The persistent question has always been – "What is my stuttering really all about?"

Aristotle concluded that people stuttered because they drank too much or thought faster than they could speak while Hippocrates thought the problem might arise from the speaker "thinking of fresh things before he

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had expressed what was already in his thoughts.”

Since the tongue and mouth were obviously involved in the struggle to speak, early approaches at fixing the problem were focused entirely in that area. Many of these “remedies” prompt a giggle and roll of the eyes. Others will make you wince.

Cornelius Celsus, a Roman physician and philosopher, thought the answer was to gargle with concoctions of various spices; chewing mustard garlic and onions (as stimulants). He also recommended rubbing the tongue with lazerwort to help relax the articulators, and massaging the head, neck, mouth and chin. If results were still not forthcoming, he required the patient to immerse his head in cold water, eat horseradish and vomit.

It goes downhill from there. For those who suffered this problem from birth, his prescription was to seize the tongue with forceps and then stretch and cut the membrane under it with a hook.

Those with surgical solutions were not easily discouraged. In 1608 the physician Febricus Hildanus cut the *lingua frenum* – the fold of skin beneath the tongue that attaches to the floor of the mouth – on the assumption that its unnatural thickness prevented the tongue from being raised to the palate or teeth.

In 1830, the surgeon Hervez de Chegoin proposed that the cause of stuttering consisted either in the shortness of the tongue or the disposition of the frenum, and he also recommended surgically removing it.

In 1841 Johann Fredrich Dieffenbach at the University of Berlin hypothesized that stuttering was caused by a spasm of the glottis that communicated itself to the tongue as a lingual cramp. His operation (prepare yourself!) consisted of cutting a triangular wedge from the root of the tongue so that the impulses could get through.

Not surprisingly, none of these surgical procedures were effective.

“Experts” in India tried their hand at creative if more benign solutions, prescribing tongue exercises and such foods as clarified butter, eggplant seeds mixed with honey, and cumin and whin seeds mixed with salt. Sour fruit was recommended to stimulate the tongue and dissolve excessive phlegm. More recently, an on-line paper describes a procedure in which a mildly poisonous snake was allowed to bite the stutterer under the tongue.

The English weighed in with their own creative approaches. Dr. Joseph Frank in his *Practice of Medicine* assumed that stuttering was a depraved habit and thought regular beatings might help.

Other remedies included injecting a French insect repellant normally rubbed on cows, bleeding the lips with leeches, and eating goat feces.

As absurd as these remedies sound today, they do illustrate a point: *People attempted to solve the puzzle of stuttering based on whatever knowledge*

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*they had at hand.* The problem was that what they needed to know was not yet known. Thus, a viable answer could not be forthcoming. That rule of thumb has carried through to the present day.

The end of the 1800s saw a shift from a physical to a psychoanalytic approach. Sigmund Freud logged in with his own theories, speculating in 1915 that stuttering might have something to do with a conflict over excremental functions. Since normal speech implied “the act of giving out, of expulsing something of oneself into the outside world,” he surmised that stuttering and especially blocking must represent constipation in some form.

Isador H. Coriat, a Boston physician, concluded that stuttering was a severe psychoneurosis caused by the persistence into adult life of infantile nursing activities. He opined that in the pregenital stage of libido development, the earlier stage with its sucking and biting movements could be demonstrated in practically any stutterer. In short, the stammerer would be seen in the act of nursing an illusory nipple.

If all this sounds painfully absurd, remember that Coriat, like all those who came before, were influenced and limited by the ideas of the day.

As we moved into the twentieth century, the social sciences became more sophisticated, and human behavior was better investigated. This included organized research into the cause of stuttering. Much of the early investigations took place at the University of Iowa under the tutelage of Carl Emil Seashore who set up the Department of Philosophy and Psychology.

The first graduate was Lee Edward Travis who from 1924 through 1927 designed and constructed the first original laboratory at Iowa focusing on research in communication disorders. Along with Samuel Orton, head of the University’s Department of Psychiatry, they developed the “Theory of Cerebral Dominance” in which they postulated that stuttering was the result of a conflict between the right and left cerebral hemisphere for control of the structures used for speaking. But after several years of intense research, it appeared that people who stuttered were not significantly different from nonstuttering individuals in terms of cerebral function.

The new program in speech and the research in cerebral dominance and stuttering drew to the University of Iowa many budding scientists who were interested in stuttering. Students who came to Iowa to investigate the problem included such familiar names as Wendell Johnson, Charles Van Riper, Oliver Bloodstein, and Dean Williams. Following the early studies in cerebral dominance, these researchers and many others continued to expand the research frontier in stuttering.

Some of their investigations included:

- The interrelationship between stuttering and personality
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- The onset and development of early stuttering
- Therapy for stuttering and its effect
- Stuttering and learning
- Listener perceptions of stuttering
- Neurophysiology of stuttering and fluency in people who stutter
- Parent-child interaction in stuttering
- Subtypes and risk factors in the onset and development of stuttering
- Interactions between motor and language processes in children who stutter
- Factors influencing treatment outcomes in stuttering

Some speech pathologists attempted to explain the dynamics of stuttering from a strictly behavioral perspective. Studies were conducted in which subjects were positively or negatively rewarded depending on how well they were able to maintain their fluency. However, no conclusive results were forthcoming, and eventually, a strict behavioral approach fell out of vogue.

Today, geneticists look for the genes that “cause” stuttering. Typically, the mass media makes a big fuss over every such discovery with headlines like “Mystery Is Solved,” but so far nobody has explained how any one mutated gene can cause stuttering and no mechanism has been proposed. Furthermore, none of the theories establish whether the gene represents a cause or simply a contributing factor. (As an analogy, if you conduct a chemical analysis of *Beef Bourguignon*, you will discover the presence of the spice thyme. But could you then claim that thyme leaves “cause” *Beef Bourguignon*. Hardly. You need a number of ingredients. Then you need to blend them in a special way.)

Thus, over the years, even with all that intellectual firepower and all those investigations, there has still not been a definitive answer. People still keep asking that same old question, “What is stuttering *really* all about?” They fail to produce a paradigm, or model, that is broad enough to encompass *all* the issues associated with chronic stuttering.

### AN OVERARCHING CONCEPT

This book is an attempt to provide an overarching concept – a concept broad enough to answer all the enduring questions about stuttering. It does this by re-characterizing what stuttering and blocking are all about.

But the book could not have come about without seven key developments that unfolded over the last half century.

**Cognitive psychology.** Cognitive psychology addresses how the person perceives his (or her) experience. A major contributor to this field was

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Alfred Korzybski, a Polish-American philosopher and scientist who is most remembered for developing the theory of general semantics – not be confused with semantics, which is a different subject. Korzybski's work, *Science and Sanity*, published in 1933, held that we cannot experience our world directly but only through our nervous system and the way we use our language. Sometimes our perceptions and our language actually mislead us as to the "facts" with which we must deal.

For example, Korzybski cautioned readers on the use of the verb "to be." He pointed out that labels, such as "I am a stutterer" or "He is a stutterer" purports to describe everything about a person – in effect creating an air tight box from which a person finds it impossible to escape. Thus, if a "stutterer" is what you *are*, then if you're not stuttering, there is something missing that's supposed to be there.

Korzybski's work helped set the scene for Gestalt Therapy, Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy, and Neuro-linguistic Programming, all disciplines in use today that are relevant and applicable to the management and dissolution of stuttering and blocking.

I discovered Korzybski's work when I began taking graduate classes in Language Arts at San Francisco State College. I was fortunate to have as a professor the noted author and general semanticist S. I. Hayakawa whose best selling book *Language in Thought and Action* was instrumental in popularizing Korzybski's work to a broad audience. My study of general semantics plus the fascinating classes taught by Hayakawa had a major impact on my thinking. The discussions and ideas helped me to understand how my habitual thought processes forced me into a performance oriented way of thinking, and how this in turn, fueled my blocking behaviors.

**The human potential movement.** In the early 60s, people – particularly those in their 20s and 30s – suddenly realized that they were not tethered to traditional life paths, and that it was okay to investigate different lifestyles in search of what made them happy and fulfilled. This emotional and intellectual explosion produced the flower children, psychedelic experiences, San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury district, and infinite experiments with new and different communities and lifestyles.

**Encounter groups.** The origin goes back to the sensitivity training group (T-group) of the late 1940s and 1950s. The T-group in turn grew out of conferences on small-group dynamics held at the National Training Laboratory in Bethel, Maine, in 1947. Originally, these groups were designed to help executives and managers become more sensitive or aware of the needs of their employees. But by the late 50s and early 60s, they had grown into something bigger and more powerful. These were known as "encounter groups" or "sensitivity groups."

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In the 1960s, there was a great deal of interest in encounter groups, especially in Northern California. The San Francisco Bay Area had become a Mecca for individuals all over the U.S. who wanted to experiment with new ways of relating.

In a typical encounter group, seven to fifteen people would get together with the aim of shedding their polite social masks and expressing their real feelings. The emphasis was on identifying verbal interaction, games and other activities that encourage open displays of approval, criticism, affection, dislike, and even anger and tears, rather than the tact and inhibition of emotional expression that ordinarily govern our social behavior.

**System thinking.** The growth of technology placed emphasis on the development of larger and more complex systems. The U.S. space program and the landing on the moon was just one example of how system thinking was transforming our concept of what was possible.

**Self-help groups.** For years, those who stuttered were forced to rely on speech pathologists or psychologists to address their stuttering-related challenges. But in the early 70s, the stuttering community recognized that there were advantages to taking responsibility for their own growth and recovery. Those who stuttered began realizing that they had a certain level of expertise. They did not have to totally leave their progress and direction to the “experts.” They could empower themselves. Organizations such as Speakeasy and the National Stuttering Association were founded during this decade.

**The personal computer.** What’s to say? The computer has changed everything. The individual now has enormous powers to investigate, learn, transform and empower his own life.

**The Internet.** In my childhood, it was unusual if a child who stuttered knew more than one other youngster battling the same problems. Today, it’s an entirely new game. Internet chat rooms, as well as websites like Facebook and YouTube give the person who stutters (PWS) the opportunity to communicate, share information, solicit advice, and brainstorm with individuals around the globe. In fact, parts of this book began life as long posts on the Stutt-L and neurosemanticsofstuttering forums.

And of course we can’t forget the Internet program Skype, which gives you the ability talk face-to-face with any other PWS in the world who has a PC or Mac and a broadband connection. All you need is Skype and an inexpensive Internet camera. You can even hold conference calls where individuals on half a dozen continents are able to participate at once.

*And all for free!*

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## *TOTAL IMMERSION*

My own stuttering had been a puzzle to me since I first stood up in fourth grade to give a report and discovered to my horror that I couldn't get any words out. Everything seemed frozen. What was maddening was how I could talk in a relaxed, informal situation, but put me in front of a classroom, an authority figure, or ask me to stop a stranger to ask directions, and there was a good chance I'd lock up like a drum. I didn't have a severe problem, like some people, but it was enough to make life unsettling and unpredictable.

In spite of my speech difficulties, or perhaps because of them, I left a secure position in my father's advertising agency when I was twenty-five and went west. Little did I know that by doing so I had started a journey to my recovery.

I arrived in San Francisco from New York in the early 60s. My first job was as an advertising copywriter working primarily in the technology field. Northern California, especially the area around San Francisco, became labeled in the 60s as "Silicon Valley" because of the rapid growth of technology companies. Although I had no technology background *per se* (I was an English major at university), I was able to pick up enough of my client's businesses to write ads about their products. These ranged from analog computers to electronic test instruments.

What I found particularly intriguing was how systems functioned. The individual elements of these electronic systems were all pushing the state of the art. But that's not what gave them such power. It was in *how* these parts interacted with each other. The Germans have a word for this – *gestalt*. The word means "an organized whole that is greater than the sum of the parts." Over time, system thinking began to influence my ideas about stuttering.

It also explained why, after centuries of trying to find the cause of stuttering, no one had developed a tangible solution that answered all the critical questions. Perhaps it was because there was no stuttering *per se*. There was instead a stuttering *gestalt*, a system that manifested itself through a particular group of components organized in a particular way.

## *ENCOUNTER GROUPS*

Another thing that influenced my thinking about stuttering was the encounter group. My initiation to this experience was Synanon, a self-help organization started in 1958 in Santa Monica, California for drug addicts, felons and other character disorders. In 1961 Synanon opened a facility

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in an old warehouse in San Francisco and soon was attracting people from the community like myself to Saturday night open houses where they had great music and snacks.

We non-addicts – they called us “squares” – were fascinated by the energy and vitality of its members. We dropped by because of the candor and honesty that was often missing in our daily lives. Everyone seemed so real and forthcoming.

A centerpiece of Synanon life was a group dynamic called the *game* in which people were pressured to be honest and open about what they thought and felt. All Synanon residents were required to participate in these *games* daily.

The *game* was a leaderless group in which the focus shifted from one person to another. The *game* was more of a free-for-all than it was therapy; a mixture of raucous laughter, tears, anger, and any other emotions that happened to surface. The objective was to help (manipulate) people to become grounded and honest. The more you were dishonest or fudged on the truth, the bigger the hole you dug for yourself.

In the early 60s, Synanon opened up the *games* to “squares” (i.e.: ordinary citizens) like me. The overall goal of these experiences was for each of us to examine our behavior and values and to become more resourceful and successful in our interpersonal relationships. Other benefits led to developing a sense of what it truly meant to be honest. We also learned a great deal about people in general. I participated in those *games* on a weekly basis during my three-year association with Synanon.

During this time I discovered volumes about myself and developed real insights into what my chronic stuttering had been all about. What I learned about stuttering was that my speech blocks involved all of me. By addressing all the key parts of the stuttering system, including the physical things I did when I blocked, I was eventually able to dissipate, or more precisely, dissolve my disfluency.

Then in 1977, ten years later, I was able to start putting this information to good use. That was the year that Michael Sugarman and Bob Goldman founded the National Stuttering Association in San Francisco. I was one of its first members.

Over the course of 34-plus years, I’ve had quite an education on stuttering. I’ve participated in thousands of hours of chapter meetings. I wrote tons of articles. I recorded many, many interviews. I’ve given speeches. I led workshops all over America and in eight countries on three continents. And I’ve heard the life stories of many thousands of people who stutter.

Drawing from this broad background, I feel satisfied that I’ve been able

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to provide a relevant answer to that age-old question – “What is chronic stuttering *really* all about.”

## *ABOUT THIS BOOK*

This is an unconventional book in several ways. For one thing, it was written – or shall I say, written and assembled – over a period of almost 30 years. Many of the chapters were articles created specifically for the National Stuttering Association newsletter *Letting GO*. Others started out as long emails written in the early morning hours for one of the two stuttering forums I’ve been active on. Still other articles were written expressly for this book.

There are also a number of pieces contributed by members of the stuttering community (including speech pathologists) who I felt had something special and unique to contribute.

Because all the pieces were initially created as stand-alone articles, you’ll notice that certain ideas, such as the description of the Stuttering Hexagon, appear in different chapters of the book. This redundancy is not an oversight. Not only were these chapters written at different times, but most chapters would not be complete without key material such as the description of the Stuttering Hexagon.

When I come upon a new idea, I need to hear it many times before it really sinks in, so hopefully, you will find this repetition useful.

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PART

1

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UNDERSTANDING THE  
STUTTERING SYSTEM

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## PART 1

Originally, this book was published under the title *How to Conquer Your Fears of Speaking Before People* and focused just on how to be more comfortable and effective as a public speaker. But when I finished writing the ten exercises, I realized that the issues I was talking about – issues such as how you felt about yourself and others, your habits of perception, your beliefs, your physiological responses, and your traditional ways of thinking – were the very same issues that have to be addressed if you want to successfully manage and resolve your stuttering.

People don't realize that everything is interconnected. A familiar line you hear is, "If I didn't stutter, I'd be able to do such and such." However, my observation is that your speech and your life must be seen as cut from the same cloth. And that the same forces that drive your stuttering are also driving the other parts of your life.

The essays in Part One attempt to define the total stuttering system, as well as answer some of the elementary questions on how and why chronic stuttering functions the way it does.

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## DO YOU SUFFER FROM PARADIGM PARALYSIS?

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If I asked you which country comes to mind when I say "wrist watches," you'd probably say Switzerland. And for good reason. The Swiss have had a history of leadership in watches that's spanned centuries. They were on the cutting edge of every innovation from self-winding watches to waterproof time pieces. By 1968 more than 65 percent of all the watches sold in the world were Swiss made. And they accounted for more than 80 percent of the profits.

Yet, by 1980 only 10 percent of all watches sold were Swiss-made, and the Swiss accounted for only 20 percent of the profits.

What happened?

When Swiss scientists at their research Institute in Neuchâtel invented the world's first electronic quartz movement – a movement that far surpassed in accuracy what mechanical watches were able to attain – they took it to the Swiss watch manufacturers. But to their amazement the old world watchmakers were unmoved.

"Where are the precise mainsprings?" they said. "Where are the other advances on which we have built our reputation? It is an interesting concept," they said. "But this certainly can't be a *watch*."

Then they made two *big* mistakes: (1) they didn't patent the quartz movement, and (2) they said, "Let's bring it to the World Watch Conference and see what people think."

Who was also attending the conference? You guessed it. Seiko. The Japanese watchmaker recognized what an extraordinary gift had been dropped in their lap. And thus it wasn't the Swiss but the Japanese who capitalized on the development of electronic quartz movement and who took a commanding lead in the worldwide watch market.

How did the Swiss overlook such a remarkable opportunity?

Swiss watchmakers were blinded by their rigid concept of what comprised a wristwatch. In short, the Swiss watch industry was suffering

## 6 *Do You Suffer from Paradigm Paralysis?*

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from *paradigm paralysis*.

What is paradigm paralysis? Or more basically, what is a paradigm?

Paradigm comes from the Greek word *paradeigma* which means “model, pattern, example.” A paradigm is set of assumptions, concepts, and beliefs that define the way we frame our thoughts. Without paradigms our minds would have no screens or filters. We’d be overwhelmed with an avalanche of thoughts and emotions. We’d have too much data. We wouldn’t know what was important and what wasn’t.

Paradigms shape the way we see. Take the example of political paradigms: a democracy, a socialistic state, a monarchy, a dictatorship, or a totalitarian state. Each represents a different way of looking at the individual. And each represents a different kind of governance. Consider how differently a gathering in the nation’s capitol would be perceived by an elected president than it would by a self-proclaimed dictator. Each paradigm causes the individual to see reality in a unique way.

Paradigms cause us to notice some things and ignore others and to anticipate what is likely to occur based on a particular set of assumptions. For example, until the 1980s peptic ulcers were believed to be caused by stress and dietary factors, and treatment focused on hospitalization, bed rest, and prescription of special bland foods. But treatment had limited effect. Then a major paradigm shift took place. In 1982 Australian physicians Robin Warren and Barry Marshall identified the link between *Helicobacter pylori* (*H. pylori*) and ulcers, and concluded that the *H. Pylori* bacterium, not stress or diet, caused peptic ulcers. This enabled the medical community to develop effective treatments.

When the paradigm in force prevents us from formulating an accurate picture of circumstances (such as what happened with peptic ulcers and with the Swiss watchmakers), we are said to be suffering from *paradigm paralysis*.

### *A SIMPLE PUZZLE*

Here’s a brain teaser. It’s not difficult to solve if you know how to approach it.

George Belfast was a very speedy individual who kept himself in superb physical condition. He boasted truthfully, “In my bedroom the nearest lamp is 12 feet away from my bed. Yet, alone in the room, without using any wires, strings or any other aids or contraptions, I can turn out the light on that lamp and get into bed before the room is dark.” How can George do it?

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Having trouble solving it? Then you may want to look at how you're framing the problem. What assumptions are you making? If you just can't find the answer, chances are you're using the wrong paradigm to solve it. (The answer to the puzzle appears as the end of this chapter.)

That's where most of us have been stuck when we try to understand stuttering. We see it as a cognitive problem. A behavioral problem. A genetic problem. Or a psychological problem. Unfortunately, none of these paradigms by itself is broad enough to contain all the answers.

But if what I've discovered about stuttering is true, we already know what we need to know. We just need to draw everything together into a paradigm that integrates *all* these different approaches. To do this, we need the assistance of the paradigm shifter.

## *THE PARADIGM SHIFTER*

In his book *Paradigms: the Business of Discovering the Future* Joel Barker describes how the person who develops a new paradigm is often an outsider. The paradigm shifter is someone who has learned to think outside the box (ie: outside the prevailing paradigm) because he or she is not part of the established order. The paradigm shifter is able to see the situation with a fresh eye.

This describes some of us in the stuttering self-help community. Because we did not train as speech-language pathologists, we were not formally indoctrinated in the classic ideas about stuttering. Many of us, of course, did acquire the traditional points of view through involvement in speech therapy. But there are others who have made meaningful discoveries through independent study and observation...and just through the process of living.

But are these discoveries worth paying attention to? After all, we're not trained in speech pathology. We don't have Ph.D.'s What can we know that would really be of use to the professional community?

## *OBSERVING WITH AN OPEN MIND*

As Eastern philosophers will tell you, one can arrive at major truths simply by observing. Margaret Mead, the anthropologist, once observed that there's a tendency among people in her field to be too quick to connect what they see to what they expect to see. She said that to really make a creative breakthrough, you can't work this way. You need to observe with a *blank mind*.

You need to sit in the native village and simply observe. At some

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## ***8 Do You Suffer from Paradigm Paralysis?***

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point you notice that these behaviors over here have something to do with those behaviors over there. Hmmm. What is that relationship? What does it mean? I'm not sure. I think I'll watch some more. And so you watch some more. Now, it may be that you *are* watching the expected roles and rituals. But maybe not. Maybe it's something completely new. That's the kind of observing that leads to breakthroughs in anthropology as well as in any other field.

I'll give you an example of what I'm talking about. I used to buy my gasoline at a service station near my home (this was before the introduction of self-serve), and every time I drove in, it was my intention to say, "fill it up" to the attendant without either blocking or resorting to tricks or techniques to avoid blocking. Some days I could do this, and other days, I couldn't. For months I wondered why.

So I began to notice what was concurrently going on in my life.

What I discovered was that on days when I was getting along well with my wife, I would have little or no difficulty saying "Fill it up."

But on days when we weren't getting along, when I was feeling angry and resentful and holding back my feelings, I had great difficulty saying "fill it up" without resorting to tricks and starter devices, such as "Yeah, can you fill it up."

In this case my unexpressed feelings toward my wife carried over to my interchange with the service station attendant. I now had someone standing over me, and being lower down created a sense of being "less than" him. This in turn triggered my fear of authority and of expressing myself openly and assertively. If asked, I would have told you that my fear of stuttering was holding me back. But it was a lot more than that.

Gradually, I began to see the subtler ways in which emotions and other factors played into the stuttering system. Had I been locked into the traditional beliefs of speech therapy and focused on stuttering exclusively, I would never have "connected the dots."

Most speech-language pathologists are trained to work within a paradigm that calls for focusing their attention almost exclusively on speech and on the emotions closely tied to feared words and speaking situations. As a result, clients are not encouraged to look beyond their fear of stuttering, and thus remain oblivious to other potential contributing factors.

### ***AN UNTAPPED RESOURCE***

Among the many people who stutter that I've met during more than 34 years as a member of the National Stuttering Association, I've encountered a small but significant group who, like myself, have recov-

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ered from stuttering. Many of us have followed different paths. One fellow I met in the early 80s took the thinking and philosophy learned in the martial arts and applied it successfully to his speech.

For myself, because I came to California during the 1960s and 70s, I had the opportunity to participate in many of the intense experiential workshops and personal growth programs that developed over that time. These programs provided opportunities for self-observation that never existed before...for anyone!...let alone for someone who stuttered. They provided me a unique platform from which to address the complex forces that fueled my speech blocks.

People who have made significant progress on their speech, and especially those who have recovered, represent an enormous resource for the professional community. Yet, we are seldom referenced this way. For example, I stuttered for 30 years. And for over 40 years I've been completely recovered. Yet in the early years how many speech pathologists said to me, "Gee, John, that's really interesting. I'd like to explore with you in detail how you did it."

Not a one!

## *A NEW PARADIGM FOR STUTTERING*

Had they asked, I would have introduced them to a paradigm for stuttering that emerged from my own life experience. I have come to understand stuttering, not simply as a speech problem, but as a *system* involving the entire person—an interactive system that's comprised of at least six essential components: behaviors, emotions, perceptions, beliefs, intentions and physiological responses. This system can be visualized as a six-sided figure in which *each point affects and is affected by all the other points*. It is the dynamic moment-by-moment interaction of these six components that maintains the stuttering system's homeostatic balance.

I find this a useful concept because it resolves the question of whether a speech block is either emotional, perceptual, physical, genetic or environmental. It is *all* these things. The blocking behavior is not an either/or issue, but a system that involves the constant interaction of all factors. Each point can exert either a negative or positive force on the other points. Thus, in a system where most of the points are negatively biased, there is little likelihood that gains in fluency or ease of self-expression can be maintained. While if the person has made gains at all points of the system, it will be supportive of freer self-expression and greater fluency. The following chapter describes this system in more detail.

Until recently, there were aspects to stuttering that couldn't be ex-

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## 10 Do You Suffer from Paradigm Paralysis?

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plored or explained because the knowledge and ideas to make these discoveries were not available. But today, fueled by new concepts in cognitive psychology and the growth of self-help organizations—and with the advent of the Internet which allows anyone with a computer and a broadband connection to easily share ideas with others around the world—we are ready to add those missing pieces.

By making it possible for all members of the stuttering community—professionals and nonprofessionals alike—to collaborate, we are finally in a position to develop a new paradigm for stuttering that can give us the answers we're looking for.

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Answer to puzzle: George went to bed during daylight hours.



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## DEVELOPING A NEW PARADIGM FOR STUTTERING

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There's a familiar brain teaser that involves a square comprised of nine dots made up of three rows of three dots each. Using only four straight lines, and without taking your pen from the paper, you are challenged to pass your pen through all nine dots.

I remember trying to solve this puzzle and my frustration at not finding the solution. After struggling for a while, it seemed there was no way it could be done, so I threw in the towel. But I just couldn't give up and a while later returned to the problem.

"What am I assuming?" I asked myself. "How am I limiting myself?"

I eventually figured it out. Like most people, I had assumed that my lines had to stay within the boundaries of the 9-dot square. Once I went beyond that self-imposed limitation, the answer was forthcoming.

The lessons of this story have applied directly to my own recovery from stuttering. As a person who has spent his professional life in a creative field (my positions with the NSA have been *pro bono*), I've learned that whenever I struggle for a long time with a problem without making headway, I'm usually trying to solve the wrong problem. As someone who stuttered for 30 years and who has been fully recovered<sup>1</sup> for the last 40, I am also convinced that the paradigms traditionally used to characterize the chronic blocks of adult stuttering are not inclusive enough to fully describe the dynamics that drive the problem.

In the following pages I would like to suggest a different paradigm, one that resonates with my evolution into a non-stutterer as well as with my more than 30 years experience in the National Stuttering Association.

But before we go on, a few words on my stuttering history. I was always aware that I had a "speech problem." At the age of four and a half I was sent for several months to the National Hospital for Speech and Hearing Disorders in New York. I later returned for several more months during the summer of my eighteenth year.

During my grammar and high school years and throughout college I

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<sup>1</sup> By "recovered" I don't mean that I am a controlled stutterer. I mean that not only has my stuttering disappeared, I no longer have the emotional responses of someone who stutters. Fear of speaking is not a consideration in my life; in fact, I enjoy virtually any opportunity to speak, such as talking on the telephone and addressing audiences.

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## 12   *Developing A New Paradigm for Stuttering*

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underwent the painful and embarrassing experiences associated with chronic stuttering. My dysfluency took the form of a silent block and was situational. I generally had little trouble speaking to my schoolmates, but if I had to recite in class, stop a stranger on the street or speak to an authority figure I would lock up. The fact that I didn't stutter in all situations made these dysfluent episodes all the more painful, since I inhabited that nether world of being neither normal nor abnormal.

Aside from the two brief episodes at the National Hospital, however, I had no formal speech therapy. I say "formal therapy" because I did spend many hours in my mid-20's carefully observing what I did when I stuttered, and over time, systematically brought into awareness the muscles and other behaviors involved in my speech blocks. I also moved to San Francisco and immersed myself in a plethora of personal growth programs that were just then being introduced in California.

### *HOW MY STUTTERING DISAPPEARED*

People frequently ask me, "When did you stop stuttering?"

I usually answer, "I stopped stuttering a long time before I stopped stuttering." This is not meant as a cryptic response, but simply to point out how the transformation took place.

Through the hundreds of hours that I participated in therapeutic and other group activities, I discovered that my "speech problem" was actually a constellation of problems. True, I did things with my lips, tongue, vocal cords and chest that were counterproductive to fluent speech, but that wasn't the only thing amiss. I lacked self-assertiveness. I was overly perfectionistic. I was overly concerned with pleasing others. I saw life as a performance. I didn't share what I felt. I didn't even know what I felt. I believed things about myself that weren't true, and blocked out things that were.

The deeper I delved into myself during these years of exploration, the more I was struck by how my various problems were not only interrelated, but dynamically present in my speech each time I blocked. It was as if each speech block, like a corner of a hologram, contained a complete view of my total self. It was during this period of self-discovery that my stuttering "disappeared," not the behaviors, of course, which took longer to tail off, but my perception of what was really going on. I no longer identified what I was doing as "stuttering."

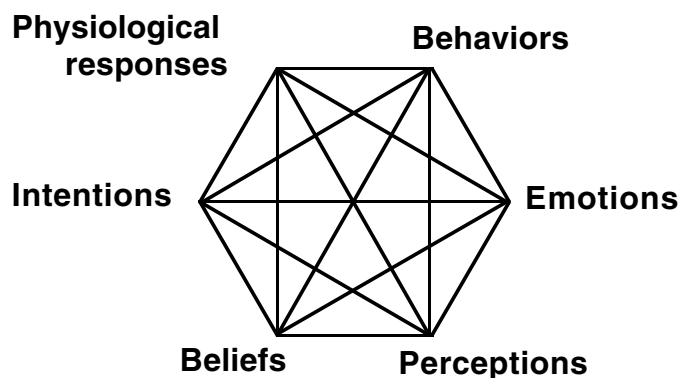
What makes stuttering such a contrary problem and so resistant to treatment is the limited way in which it is traditionally perceived. Stuttering is generally regarded as a speech problem. But stuttering can be more accurately understood as a *system* involving the entire person—

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an interactive system that's comprised of at least six essential components: behaviors emotions, perceptions, beliefs, intentions and physiological responses.

This system can be visualized as a six-sided figure—in effect, a

### THE STUTTERING HEXAGON



Stuttering Hexagon—with each point of the Hexagon connected to and affecting all the other points. It is the moment-by-moment dynamic interaction of these six components that maintains the system's homeostatic balance.

It is precisely because of the self-perpetuating nature of the system that it is so difficult to bring about permanent change at only one point. What usually happens is that after therapy most people who stutter slide back. This is because many therapy programs simply adopt a strategy of *control* in which only speech issues are addressed. Nothing is done to transform the system that supports the dysfluent speech. A strategy of *disappearance*, on the other hand, calls for breaking down the stuttering system into its separate components and making changes concurrently at other points around the Stuttering Hexagon—specifically addressing the individual's emotions, perceptions, beliefs and programming. Pursuing this global strategy can lead to a *self-maintaining fluency system* because not only are the speech blocks addressed but also those contributing factors which lead the person to block. It can also lead to a different perception of what stuttering is all about.

### BUILDING A SYSTEM MENTALITY

To understand how a different system paradigm can change your perception, consider this analogy. Let's say you're about to demonstrate to two interested spectators the operation of a new remote controlled

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## 14 *Developing A New Paradigm for Stuttering*

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car—the kind you can buy at Radio Shack for under \$50. One spectator is a 2-year-old boy. The other is a mechanical engineer.

The 2-year-old sees the car as a single living object. It seemingly has a will of its own, at one moment darting forward, then stopping, turning, exploring; a capricious little life form. The engineer, on the other hand, has a totally different experience. He sees the car, not as a *thing*, but as a system comprised of interacting parts. He inspects the motor, examines the electronics. He develops an understanding of the parts and how they interrelate.

This analogy is not dissimilar from the differences between how I used to see stuttering and how I see it today. As a teenager, I experienced stuttering as a *thing*, a life form whose behavior I could not predict from day to day. Today, having “popped the hood” and looked inside, I understand that this “thing” I called stuttering is actually a collection of components in a particular kind of relationship.

But hold on. We have a problem, because at this moment you don’t know for sure what I mean by “stuttering.” Am I talking about the kind of stumbling that 8-year-old Johnny does when you surprise him with his hand in the cookie jar? Or am I talking about Johnny’s struggle to say his name when I introduce him to you. How can we continue this discussion when we may not even be talking about the same problem?

To aid in this process, there’s something we first need to do: we need to replace the word “stuttering.” In a letter to the editor<sup>2</sup> in the *Journal of Fluency Disorders* I argued how the word “stuttering” promotes confusion by being too vague and unspecific. I observed that the easy disfluencies that many people experience in emotional situations are manifestly different from the struggle behavior characteristic of a full-fledged stuttering block. One is a reflex triggered by emotions and probably influenced by genetic factors. The other is a learned strategy, a set of behaviors designed to break through or wait out a speech block. They are, in short, not simply points on a continuum but entirely different phenomena. By using a common name, we imply relationships and similarities that may not in fact exist, and it only creates endless confusion to call them by the same name—“stuttering”—even if we distinguish one as “primary” and the other as “secondary.”

For this reason, I propose that we give up the word “stuttering” (except in the broadest of discussions) and differentiate each of five different behaviors by assigning to it its own separate and unique terminology.

- The dysfluencies related to primary pathology such as cerebral insult or intellectual deficit we’ll call *pathological disfluency*.

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<sup>2</sup> *How to Rid Yourself of Stuttering in under 60 Seconds*. John C. Harrison, *J. Fluency Disord.*, 16 (1991) 327-333.

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- The disfluencies that surface as the young child struggles to master the intricacies of speech we'll call *developmental disfluency*. This has a developmental model all its own which is separate and distinct from the developmental model of adult blocking behavior. Developmental disfluency often disappears on its own as the child matures. It is also highly receptive to therapeutic intervention, so much so that when treated early enough, most children attain normal speech without any need to exercise controls. (Note: Both pathological dysfluency and developmental disfluency are subjects that will not be addressed in this chapter, since we are limiting our discussion to chronic blocking.)
- For the easy and unselfconscious disfluency characteristic of those who are temporarily upset or discombobulated we'll need to make up a word, since one does not exist. We'll call this kind of disfluency *bobulating*. Almost everyone bobulates under certain stressful conditions. However, this is usually not a chronic problem, and even if it were, the person is generally unaware of his behavior and is, therefore, unlikely to have negative feelings toward it.
- The struggled, choked speech block that comes about when someone obstructs his air flow and constricts his muscles we'll call *blocking* because the person is blocking something from his awareness (such uncomfortable emotions or self-perceptions) or blocking something from happening that may have negative repercussions. This is the chronic disfluency that most people think of when they speak of "stuttering" behavior that extends into adulthood. Unlike developmental disfluency and bobulating, blocking is a *strategy* designed to protect the speaker from unpleasant consequences.
- Finally, there is a fifth kind of dysfluency related to blocking that occurs when the person continues to repeat a word or syllable because he has a fear that he will block on the following word or syllable. Since he is just buying time until he feels ready to say the feared word, we'll call this kind of dysfluency *stalling*. Because stalling is an alternate strategy to the overt struggle behavior associated with speech blocks, the two must be considered in the same vein.

I know that many readers will bridle at the thought of not using "stuttering" as common currency in all situations. But since developmental disfluency, bobulating, blocking and stalling can look identical to the untrained eye (and, unfortunately, to some trained eyes as well), calling them all "stuttering" can substantially help to obfuscate the problem<sup>3,4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> I'm not the first to feel that the word "stuttering" has vast deficiencies as an accurate descriptor. An article in the *Journal of Fluency Disorders* in December 1989 by R.M. Boehmler and

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## THE COMMONALITY OF SYSTEMS

Some years ago at the National Stuttering Association's Seventh Annual Convention in Dallas I was conducting a mini-seminar on the Stuttering Hexagon.

"How many people have ever wrestled with a weight problem?" I asked. As expected, more than half the people raised their hands.

I walked over to the flip chart. "As you probably know, studies indicate that over 85% of all people who go on a diet eventually regain the weight they've lost. So let's make a list of some of the reasons why diets don't work. What's hard about staying on a diet?"

People began calling out their reasons. "No fun," somebody volunteered. "I'm rebellious," called another. "Easy to procrastinate," somebody else said. "I go on automatic when I'm stressed," offered a fourth. In a few minutes I had written a list of some twenty to thirty reasons why diets traditionally fail.

"Okay, watch this," I said. "We're going to do a little sleight of hand."

Up to this point I had left the chart untitled. I then wrote the title: "Why people have problems with speech therapy."

You could have heard a pin drop as people contemplated the chart. Remarkably, the reasons why diets by themselves are ineffective were almost identical to why over 85% of those undergoing speech therapy lose ground in the ensuing months.

Successfully giving up weight and successfully recovering from chronic stuttering (blocking) are both system problems to which the hexagon paradigm applies.

To better understand this, let us expand our analogy and develop in parallel the ways that the Hexagon paradigm applies equally to blocking and to losing weight.

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S.I. Boehmler addresses this same issue:

From the synopsis: "There is a consensus among speech-language pathologists that the cause of stuttering is unknown. This lack of understanding is not due to the lack of research effort, but it may be due to asking an unanswerable question. We may already know the causes of many of those behaviors that make up the general concept, stuttering, if we would ask more specific questions."

The article goes on to say that, "The term *stuttering* is used to refer to a wide variety of behaviors, feelings, or phenomena. The term is used as a label for an abstract concept. Use of such abstract terms in research questions may make the question unanswerable by the standards of scientific methodology. One cannot get concrete, scientific answers to abstract, vague questions. Instead of asking, 'What causes stuttering,' it might be more productive to separate questions about dysfluencies from questions about blocks.... We might instead ask, 'What causes elemental repetitions?' or 'What causes blocks?' It has been clinically productive to go further and formulate causal hypotheses about specific types of blocks and subcategories of traditional dysfluency types. A...glottal block, does not necessarily have the same cause as ...a lingual block. Not all elemental repetitions would logically have the same etiology.

..."Directing our causal hypotheses around the collective group of behaviors we call

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## *THE SIX POINTS OF THE STUTTERING HEXAGON*

**Physiological responses.** Some people have a predisposition to being overweight. They're born with a greater concentration of cellulite, a sluggish metabolism, a problematic thyroid. Similarly, people react differently to stress. If a car backfires loudly, one person's autonomic nervous system may go into overload while another's may hardly react at all. As we know, stress can induce disfluency by interfering with an individual's fine-motor performance. The physiological component might be explained by personal differences in muscle latencies, neurotransmitters, nervous system thresholds, respirator/speech-motor systems coordination, and/or speech-motor processing, planning and execution. But whether an individual's disfluency turns into debilitating blocks or a simple disruption in the smooth flow of speech (bobulations) depends on many other factors. Most discussions on whether "stuttering" is or is not genetic fail to distinguish between the physiological responses associated with bobulating, blocking or stalling. This leads to endless confusion because the involved parties are not in agreement on exactly what is meant by "stuttering."

**Behaviors.** Are certain behaviors counterproductive to losing weight? Of course. They're described as "bringing the fork to the mouth," "dipping into the cookie jar," "licking the ice cream cone." It's obvious that if you could curtail the behavior, you could remove the weight problem. Similarly, we know that there are specific behaviors—holding the breath, pursing the lips, locking the vocal cords—that are counterproductive to fluent speech. We also know that if the person curtails these behaviors, fluency is possible.

**Emotions.** If you've ever been to a party where you found yourself uncomfortable, you probably remember how hard it was to curb your appetite when the hors d'oeuvre tray came around. People eat when

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'stuttering' has not proven to be fruitful. Liebetrau et al. (1981) point out 'stuttering is not a unitary disorder, but rather a generic label for a wide range of related disorders.' ...Our research efforts may be more productive and our intervention more effective if we focus on very specific behaviors rather than on a collection of related behaviors.

"It is our belief that the 'cause' of 'stuttering' is knowable, and perhaps already known to a great extent, using current data, if the question is asked in an answerable form." *The Cause of Stuttering: What's the Question?* R.M. Boehmler and S. I. Boehmler, J. Fluency Disord., 14 (1989), 447-450.

<sup>4</sup> Dr. Eugene B. Cooper also shares these same sentiments. In an interview printed in *The Clinical Connection*, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 1-4, he opines that "with our increased understanding of the complexity of fluency disorders, the term stuttering, like the term cancer, simply does not convey sufficient information to be very useful in our discussions of the problem. In fact, the continued use of the term as a definitive diagnostic label is counter-productive. Its use as a diagnostic label suggests there is only one type of stuttering disorder and that the disorder's single determining characteristic is disfluent behavior when in fact clinical stuttering is composed of affective and cognitive components as well as behavioral components."

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they're anxious, another example of how emotions drive behavior. But behavior (overeating) also leads to obesity which leads to more emotion (self-hate, embarrassment, etc.), which leads to more eating. This closed loop demonstrates how certain behaviors become self-perpetuating.

Similarly, in the development of chronic stuttering, early emotional upsets can lead to bobulating. If this, in turn, leads to overcontrolled speech and chronic blocking, then the inability to speak at the appropriate moment will engender emotional upsets such as frustration, fear, embarrassment, dejection, helplessness, which, in turn, can trigger more struggle which leads to more speech blocks.

**Perceptions.** Perceptions are what we experience in the moment and are shaped by our beliefs, expectations and state of mind. For example, the anorexic person may be thin as a rail, but when she looks in the mirror, she sees an overweight person who needs to starve herself even more. If our crops are shriveling on the vine for lack of water, we will perceive that sudden downpour differently than the person whose home threatens to be flooded by the rapidly rising river. And if we believe we're an oddity because of how we talk, we may perceive the whispered comments of one person to another as being about us when that may not be the case at all.

**Beliefs.** Unlike perceptions, which can be easily modified by how we feel at the time, beliefs remain relatively constant from moment to moment. Negative beliefs, in particular, can keep us in a one-down position and make it difficult for us to change. We may believe that we can never be thin. We may believe that good-looking girls (or guys) will never want to go out with us. We may believe it's wrong to be assertive. We may believe that we're different from other people because we stutter.

Our beliefs come about in two different ways. First, they're created by everything we've been taught, especially by authority figures (such as our parents) who are so credible to us that we take what they say at face value. We're convinced they speak the truth. Beliefs are also built from experiences that repeatedly turn out in a particular way. For example, the job-looker who's been turned down for a dozen positions may come to believe that he's not employable. Once our beliefs are formed, we tend to shape our perceptions to fit those beliefs. In effect, our beliefs function like a pair of tinted glasses; they color the way we see and experience.

**Intentions.** We also develop behavioral programs to help us manage our daily encounters with life. These programs (or "games", as psychiatrist Eric Berne labeled them), can end up working against us. For example, if we are rebellious toward authority, we may perceive any friendly request as a demand, which then motivates us to find subtle ways

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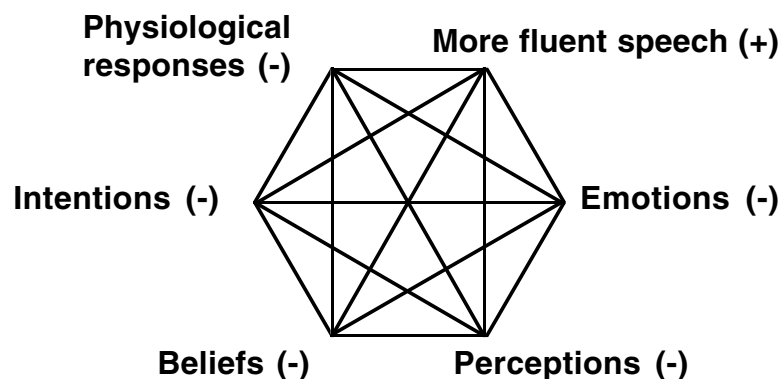
to undermine the person's authority. If the request is for us to lose weight, we may instead head for the refrigerator. If the request is to undergo speech therapy, and if we are harboring hidden anger and rebellion, it may lead us to initiate strategies that undermine the therapy and cause it to fail, thereby proving the authority wrong (and us right!) Similarly, in a speech block, our *apparent intention* may be to speak the word, while our equally powerful *hidden intention* may be to hold back out of fear of revealing ourselves, our imperfections, etc. When our intentions pull us in opposite directions, we experience ourselves as blocked and unable to move.

### *A SELF-MAINTAINING SYSTEM*

What makes the Hexagon able to support itself is that, functionally, *all points interact with all other points*. This interaction is happening moment by moment, in real time. For example, it's not just our beliefs that have a bearing on our perceptions. Our perceptions are also affected by our emotions, behaviors, hidden games and even our genetically-induced responses. Any changes made at one point are felt at all the other points as well. This principle holds true for every point on the Hexagon.

It's important to keep this interconnection in mind whenever we're working to effect a change with an individual's speech. Let's say a person

### **A SYSTEM UNSUPPORTIVE OF FLUENT SPEECH**



Because improvements have not been made at other points on the Hexagon, the individual will find it difficult, if not impossible, to maintain the fluency achieved in therapy. Any gains in speech will ultimately slip away as this negatively biased system attempts to bring all points back into a negative equilibrium.

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<sup>5</sup> Throughout this piece "she" is implied with every use of the male pronoun.

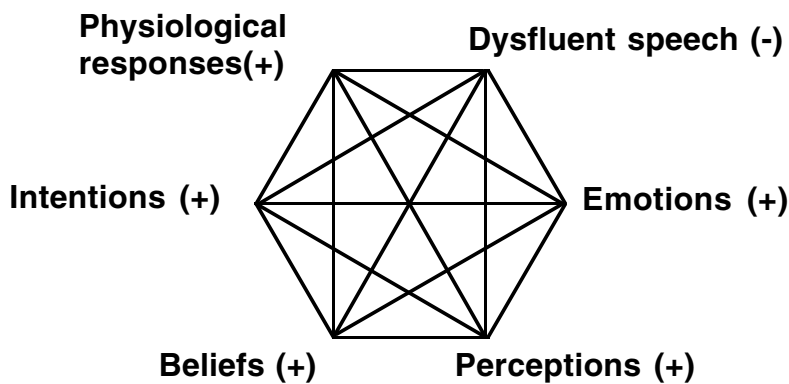
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undergoes a successful program of speech therapy. He (or she)<sup>5</sup> achieves a high level of fluency. But in the weeks and months that follow the person does nothing to modify (1) his negative *emotional* responses; (2) his negative *perceptions*; (3) what he negatively *believes* to be possible, and that includes every belief he holds about who and what he is; and (4) the negative psychological *programming* or patterned behavior that leads him to react in self-defeating ways.

What is likely to happen?

His blocking will return (or in the case of weight, the pounds will reappear.) This is because each of these points is continually exerting a negative influence on the only positive point in the system (Point #2: fluent speech), and over time the person's speech will gradually slip back into the old familiar dysfluency. In short, the original system will reestablish itself.

### **A SYSTEM THAT SUPPORTS FLUENT SPEECH**



Although this person is still dysfluent, the Hexagon will reinforce any gains made in fluency, because the world he has created for himself is less threatening and more supportive of self-expression.

The hexagon dynamic also explains why some people go through speech therapy (or diets) and *are* able to maintain their gains. They've *already* been making significant changes at the other points on the Hexagon, so the Hexagon is structured to support a more liberated, expressive, confident way of speaking.

### **MOVING TO A FUNCTIONAL LEVEL**

So far in our discussion of the Stuttering Hexagon I've been describing the system from a broad perspective. I've proposed that there are at least six factors involved in blocking, and these are the six components

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of the Stuttering Hexagon: genetics, emotions, perceptions, beliefs, behaviors and intentions. I've suggested that each component is constantly affecting, and being affected by, all other components. Now I'd like to demonstrate the Hexagon on a functional level and show how it affects our speech on a word-by-word basis....how, in fact, it creates the stuttering block itself.

I work on a Macintosh computer, and one of the programs I can't live without is the interactive spell checker. As I type each word, the computer compares it to the correctly spelled word stored in a dictionary deep in RAM memory. If the word is not spelled correctly, the word is highlighted. The highlight generally comes just a few hundredths of a second after I finish typing the word. Under any circumstance, this is fast. But it's not as fast as the human mind, as this next account will demonstrate.

One evening some years ago I was listening to a new talk show host on KCBS radio in San Francisco. The host was discussing advancement opportunities for women when he made a Freudian slip that he caught and corrected in the shortest instance I'd ever experienced. (This was during the time when the women's movement was pressing forward on all fronts.) He said something like, "When it comes to climbing the corporate ladder, I think girls I can't believe I said that I think women deserve equal opportunity..." and he went on with his rap.

The host had made an embarrassing faux pas. He had called women "girls." But what was startling was how fast he corrected himself. He said the word "girls," his ear processed the sound, his mind processed the word, caught the slip, searched the stored memory for the appropriate word, delivered the word to the voice mechanism which spoke the corrected word, *all without missing a beat*. There was literally no perceived time between the slip and the correction. His original statement and his correction were spoken as a run-on sentence with no discernible pause. Mind you, this fellow was not a slow talker. Like many radio personalities, he was racing along at maybe 130 words a minute, so each step in the process I just described had to have been measured in milliseconds. *That's* how fast the mind works.

I'm suggesting that, as the person with a chronic blocking problem approaches each word, his mind acts like the forward-looking radar on a high performance fighter flying just a few hundred feet off the ground. The radar looks ahead for hazards, sees a hill or tall building, sends the information back to the aircraft where the on-board computer evaluates this data and sends the appropriate commands to the ailerons and other control surfaces that cause the plane to move higher and avoid the danger.

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In the case of blocking, the danger may be a feared block on a particular word, or a feared situation in which the emotions associated with the freely spoken word represent a danger. Because the mind is capable of working so quickly, it has abundant time to look ahead, process each word for safety by accessing the mind's vast memory banks, and if a threat is perceived, plan and initiate a defensive strategy...a strategy that calls for holding oneself back until the danger has passed.

I'm suggesting that, instead of having to blame speech blocks on some mysterious genetic glitch or the confluence of unknown factors, we can make sense of them with information already at hand. We can satisfactorily explain speech blocks as an incredibly rapid series of events in which the lightening-like processing of the mind references the emotions, perceptions, beliefs and intentions, and as the result of the perceived danger, executes defensive strategies on a word-by-word basis.

In short, what I'm suggesting is that the Stuttering Hexagon is both a conceptual framework and a real-time data processing model that describes how the mind and body work together to process experience and take remedial action.

### *HOW THE HEXAGON OPERATES*

To see this process in action, we'll create a scenario in which Bob, a shy young man, is building up enough nerve to make a pass at an attractive girl in a cocktail lounge (always an emotionally loaded situation). What he wants to say is, "Hi, my name is Bob. I just flew in from San Francisco. Can I buy you a drink?"

Let's step back and look at his Stuttering Hexagon. Bob perceives that Sally, the young woman, is attractive; he is drawn to her. However, since Bob does not perceive himself as her equal, he automatically gives her power over him, specifically, the power to validate him. Thus, his *perceptions* have a negative bias.

Because Bob tends to automatically put himself in a one-down position, he believes that Sally will not be interested in him. She'll reject his offer. So his *beliefs* also have a negative bias...even more so since experience already leads him to believe that he will have difficulty saying his name.

But Bob is really attracted to Sally, so he persists. However, his perceptions and beliefs have triggered a medley of negative emotions: fear (of being rejected), hurt (anticipated, because of the rejection), and anger (anticipated, as a reaction to being hurt). This gives his *emotions* a negative bias.

Now let's move in closer and look at the words he wants to say. His genetic makeup is such that he's quick to react under stress, and his

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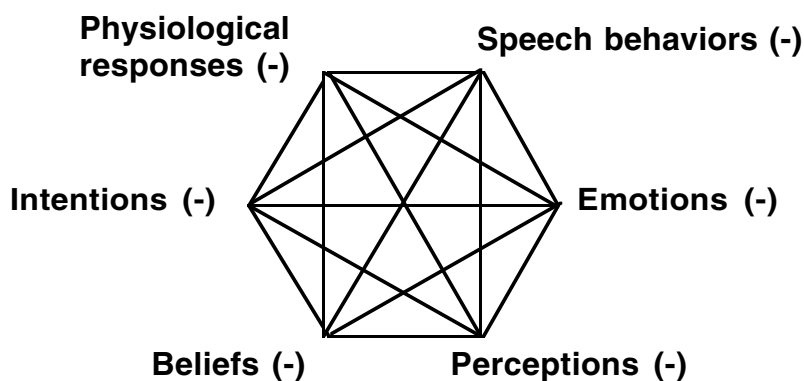
stress reaction is heightened as he approaches the moment when he must give his name. Saying his name is particularly difficult because he perceives that people expect him to say it without hesitation (after all, he *should* know what his own name is without having to think), and this pumps up his fear level.

Consequently, his adrenaline level skyrockets as his body marshals itself for fight or flight. His heartbeat increases. His blood pressure soars. Blood rushes away from his stomach and toward his muscles. His chest tightens. All of this is a genetically driven response to prepare for danger. He's now in a stress reaction, ready to meet the threat. But this is not a physical danger, as the body believes. It's a social danger. No matter. The body doesn't perceive the difference. So here is Bob, trying to look relaxed and casual, while his body is marshalling its defenses for physical attack. Does all this help to build his confidence? It does not, because his *physiological response* to danger is creating additional insecurity and discomfort.

Bob has also conflicting *intentions*. On one hand, he wants to communicate with Sally; on the other hand, he is afraid of letting go and investing himself totally in the moment and perhaps be rejected. So his hidden intentions are negative as well.

If Bob says his name assertively, he'd be acting outside his comfort

### BOB'S FIRST ATTEMPT TO SAY HIS NAME



Since all the elements of this system are negatively biased, they all have an inhibiting influence on Bob's ability to freely say his name.

zone, reaching beyond what his self-image says is credible. Thus, as he goes to say the word "Bob," two overpowering fears surface: (1) the fear that he may block, and/or (2) the fear that he may come off as too aggressive.

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What does he do? He retreats into his comfort zone and holds back.

But at the same time, he also tries to push out the word.

If his will to speak and not speak are of equal strength, he'll find himself blocked, unable to move in either direction. The block in turn will generate a sense of panic which will render him "unconscious." He will lose contact with his experience and with the other person. In desperation, he may try to forcefully break out of the block by trying to say the word any way he can. In so doing, he will execute a Valsalva maneuver<sup>6</sup>, a strategy identified with performing acts of strenuous physical effort. This calls for further locking of the throat, tightening of the abdominal muscles and building up of air pressure in the chest as he tries to push the words out. (As an alternative strategy, he may also *stall* by repeating the word "is" until he feels ready to say the word "Bob") He will continue to be blocked until the intensity of his panic begins to drop, at which point his muscles will begin to relax, and he will suddenly find himself able to continue on with the sentence. As we can see, then, his habitual *behaviors* are also a negative. So all the negatives reinforce each other, creating a self-supporting, negatively biased system.

This is, of course, not the only circumstance under which Bob may block, but hopefully, it is a convincing demonstration of how the parts of the Hexagon work together to immobilize his ability to speak.

To recapitulate, the blocking system operates like a forward-looking radar that anticipates problems before they happen on a situation-by-situation and word-by-word basis. Every word has its individual Hexagon, which can contain negatively or positively biased data. The information contained in the Stuttering Hexagon is scanned by the mind which, like a forward-looking radar, is constantly searching ahead for danger. If the information in the Hexagon constitutes a threat, the word will feel "loaded", and Bob's survival system will chart a course to avoid the danger by holding back until the danger has passed. Thus, on bad days when his self-esteem is low, most words may feel threatening, while on days when he's feeling good, the same words will be easier to say. However, some words will probably maintain their negative or positive bias, no matter what kind of day it is. Loaded words like "stuttering" may continue to be stumbling blocks, even when things are going well.

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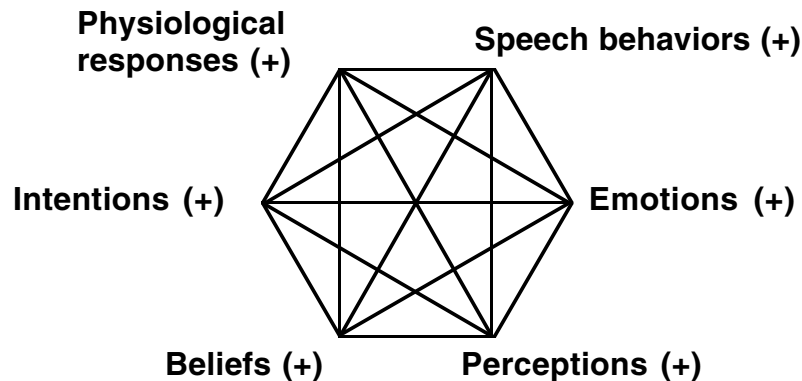
<sup>6</sup> *Stuttering and the Valsalva Mechanism: A Hypothesis in Need of Investigation*. William D. Parry, J. Fluency Disord., 10 (1985) 317-324.

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## CHANGING THE SCENARIO

Now let's rewrite the script. Let's see how life could recreate this scene with a positive Hexagon that makes Bob's encounter with Sally more pleasurable, and speech-wise, more productive.

### BOB'S SECOND ATTEMPT TO SAY HIS NAME



Now that the elements of this system are positively biased, Bob finds it easier to say his name without holding back. This is because all the points on the Hexagon are exerting a positive influence on his ability to let go and express himself.

We have the same young man in the same cocktail lounge trying to start a conversation with the same young lady. However, in this version Bob's circumstances have changed. The book he's been working on for the last three years has just been accepted by a New York publisher. As a result, Bob feels accepted, validated, and his self-esteem is at an all-time high. In this frame of mind, he approaches Sally in the cocktail lounge. Keep in mind that what he wants to say is, "Hi, my name is Bob."

He begins. "Hi, my name is..." So far these words are neutral. Now comes the loaded word— "Bob." However, the bias of the word has changed from negative to positive. Why is this? Look at the bigger Hexagon of Bob's life. Let's see why Bob is finding it easier to speak.

- His *perceptions* are shifted from negative to positive. Previously, he felt unacknowledged; now he's been validated and feels the heady confidence that goes with it.
  - His new self-perceptions affect his *beliefs*. Previously, he had no confidence as a starving writer. Why should a beautiful woman go out with him? What could he offer her? But as a writer whose skills have been acknowledged, he now feels worthy. He's now *somebody* who has the right to speak up and assert himself.
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- Positive perceptions and beliefs lead to positive *emotions*. And of course, positive emotions lead to more upbeat perceptions and beliefs.
- The negative *intentions* to hold back and hide that normally would have kicked in when he was trying to say the word “Bob” are no longer operating, because they don’t fit with the new, positive Hexagon. The name “Bob” now means something he’s proud of.
- Because he is no longer relying on Sally for acceptance—that is, because he no longer needs her to make him whole—there’s less riding on the experience. Without the same feeling of impending disaster, Bob’s sympathetic nervous system does not push him into a fight-or-flight response. He’s not caught in a do-or-die scenario. Emotionally he remains confident and collected, so he does not fall into the *physiological response*—panic—that led to the previous crisis.
- Within this positive system Bob no longer feels the need to hold back. Quite the opposite, Bob wants to let go and share his good feelings with everyone he meets. He expects a positive reaction, so he puts out positive feelings which the young woman responds to, causing an even greater surge of confidence.

Until experience brings about more lasting changes, the Hexagon will be vulnerable to whatever life serves up—anything from the publication of a book to the offhanded remark of a co-worker. And each change on the Hexagon will be reflected in the individual’s speech. In Bob’s case, he’s

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<sup>7</sup> There is, however, another scenario that can lead to a speech block, even on a good day. Let’s see how that might show up in Bob’s encounter with Sally.

We’ll go back and pick up the story as Bob continues on with his sentence, “I just got in from...” He goes to say the word “San”. However, experience has led him to believe that he always has trouble with “s” words, especially the “San” in San Francisco. So as he approaches the word, he prepares himself for the anticipated struggle by “tuning” the muscles of the Valsalva mechanism, that is, he makes them ready to activate.

He readies his vocal folds for an effort closure. An effort closure will be necessary to block the air flow and build up the necessary lung pressure to maximize his ability to push, which he anticipates will be needed to get the word out. Alternatively, he may prepare his tongue to block off the air flow by pushing against his palate. He also readies his abdominal muscles and anal sphincter to tighten, since these will come into play in the efforting process.

Bob comes to the word “San”. Because his Valsalva muscles have been tuned, they instantly respond and execute a Valsalva maneuver. Unfortunately, a Valsalva maneuver is counterproductive to speech. However, in Bob’s more positive frame of mind, even this block might turn out to be just a momentary setback.

The Valsalva hypothesis is fully presented in a privately published book *Understanding and Controlling Stuttering: A comprehensive new approach based on the Valsalva Hypothesis* by William D. Parry, Esq. Copies can be obtained from the author at 520 Baird Road, Merion, PA 19066.

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probably not aware of why he's finding it easier to talk. All he knows is that, speech-wise, he's having a good day.<sup>7</sup>

### *SOLVING SOME AGE-OLD RIDDLES*

What I like about the Hexagon paradigm is that it provides credible answers for virtually every question I've ever had about stuttering. Let's look at several of the more common questions and see how the Hexagon goes about answering them.

**Question:** Why does chronic stuttering seem to run in families? Doesn't this prove that it's genetic?

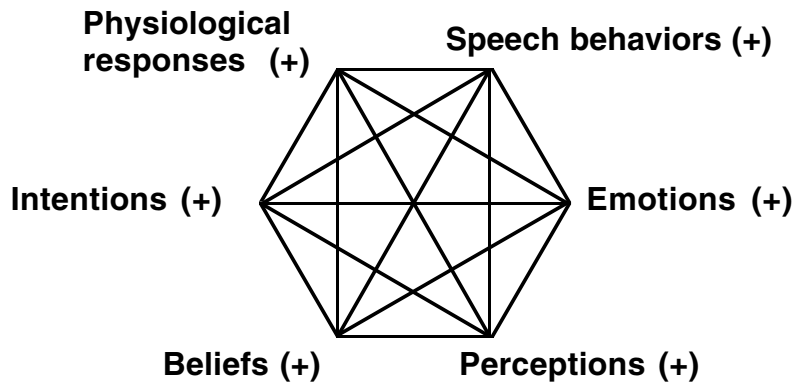
**Answer:** Not at all. What people don't take into account is that, not only negative genes, but negative emotions, perceptions, beliefs and psychological games are also passed along from one generation to another. For example, it's not by accident that Dan Greenberg's book, *How to Be A Jewish Mother* resonated with Jewish readers over different generations. Attitudes, values and behaviors are good "time travellers" within cultures and within families. When the components of the Stuttering Hexagon exist within a family, it is only a matter of time until circumstances bring these components together in the life of one individual in a way that causes them go "critical" — to borrow a term from nuclear physics. Once the components organize themselves into a self-supporting system, you have the first appearance of speech blocks.

**Question:** Of the children who are disfluent at an early age, why do most of them not develop a chronic stuttering problem?

**Answer:** Children who are disfluent at an early age are usually either bobulating or struggling with developmental disfluency. It takes time to build the emotions, perceptions, beliefs, fears and psychological games that comprise a chronic speech block. If the youngster is in a supportive environment free of underlying stresses where pressures to perform do not affect his speech, then the struggle and avoidance behaviors that lead to blocking never take place. In other words, the Stuttering Hexagon is never given an opportunity to form.

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### JEAN IN RELATIONSHIP TO CHILDREN



**Question:** Why can someone talk to children without difficulty and minutes later totally choke when asked to address an adult?

**Answer:** To explain this, let's create an example. Let's look at Jean, a young woman who teaches kindergarten and see how she perceives herself in two different situations.

In the classroom Jean clearly perceives herself as the boss, and her emotions vis-a-vis the children are parental and supportive. Her word is law, and with no one to challenge her knowledge or authority, her intentions are always clear. Thus, there is no ambiguity around issues of control. Nor does she ever feel judged, because there is no one in the classroom who is capable of judging her. In this nonthreatening environment her beliefs about herself closely parallel what is true. Consequently, when she goes to speak, there is no reason to hold back, and the words come out easily and fluently.

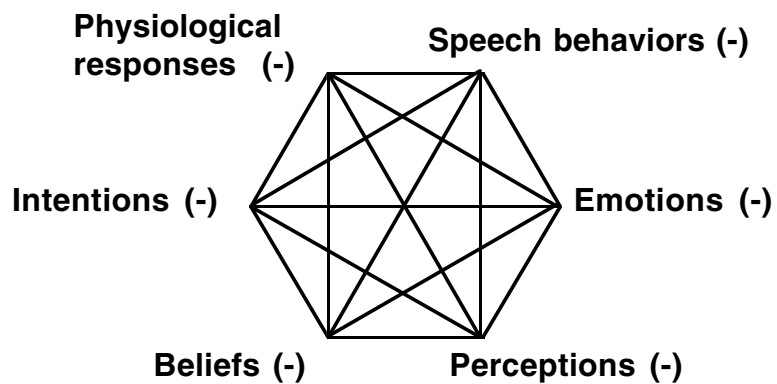
But when the class ends and she goes to the teachers meeting where she is scheduled to make an oral report, she moves into a radically different environment, and this, in turn, initiates a dramatically different hexagon.

In meeting with her peers, Jean's beliefs about having to perform to high standards now come into play. She perceives the others to be her judges, especially the principal whom she sees as an authority figure. This, in turn, elicits emotions such as fear and anger, feelings that she may not only find difficult to express, but even to acknowledge. Sensing that others may judge her, Jean is

threatened, and her body/mind, not distinguishing between physical and social threat, initiates the familiar genetic responses associated with fight or flight.

In this threatening environment, her intentions become split. On one hand she wants to give her report; on the other, she does not want to put herself at risk and make

### JEAN IN RELATIONSHIP TO ADULTS



herself vulnerable. The ensuing approach-avoidance struggle becomes visible in her halting and fragmented speech.

The previous example is not a universal explanation for why all people do or don't block, but it does demonstrate how changes around the hexagon can affect the individual in significant ways, and how such changes build a reality that has a concomitant effect on the person's speech.

**Question:** Why does chronic blocking and/or stalling sometimes disappear or significantly reduce as people get older?

**Answer:** As people live out their lives, they continue to make concurrent changes around the Stuttering Hexagon. Building personal skills, rethinking values, establishing support systems, and broadening one's perspective on life can create a Hexagon that supports honesty, self-love, freedom of expression and letting go. This, in turn, can lead to greater fluency.

The Hexagon also provides a foundation for the concept of Chronic Perseverative Stuttering (CPS) Syndrome as advanced by Dr. Eugene B.

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Cooper in a presentation at the 1986 convention of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association in Detroit.

Dr. Cooper describes CPS Syndrome as “an adolescent and adult disorder in the fluency of speech resulting from multiple coexisting physiological, psychological and environmental factors, distinguished by (a) recurrence following periods of remission, (b) characteristic cognitive, affective and behavioral response patterns and (c) susceptibility to alleviation but, given the present state of the healing arts, not to eradication.”

The Stuttering Hexagon would explain CPS Syndrome this way. The individual presenting CPS Syndrome is unwilling or incapable of making all the necessary changes around the Hexagon needed to build a foundation for total and lasting fluency. For example, the person may have *emotions* that he may not be ready to deal with. He may be locked in relationships that pressure him to *perceive* the world in a particular way. This, in turn, makes him unwilling to challenge basic *beliefs* about himself. In such cases speech therapy, by itself, will not be able to disable the system that supports blocked speech, and there will always be a tendency to hold back.

What the Stuttering Hexagon *can* do is help to identify those areas where improvement will have the greatest impact on his speech. Thus, if he changes his perceptions in ways that allow him to reduce his level of stress by 25%...and allows 25% more emotions to come through...and reduces his need to be perfect by 25%...and becomes 25% more assertive...and reduces his self-defeating games by 25%...and if he combines this with fluency training, then he is able to develop a Hexagon that is 25% more supportive of fluent speech. True, his speech won't in all likelihood be completely fluent, but it may attain a level that serves his needs.

In short, the Stuttering Hexagon can show *where* his areas of weakness lie. And it can broaden the focus of both therapist and client, so they don't become obsessively focused on speech to the exclusion of those other factors that need to be addressed.

### *SOME PROBLEMS CANNOT BE SOLVED*

A word about "cures." We keep thinking that we can *solve* stuttering as if it were some kind of math problem. True, you can seem to make a behavior disappear by focusing on not doing it, as is suggested in fluency shaping programs. But unless you carry this process one step further to where you also dissolve the “glue” that holds the stuttering system together, the behavior will almost always return.

Why?

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The great irony is that the harder you try to solve a stuttering problem, the more you reinforce its presence, because in order to have something to solve, you must continually recreate it.

Does that mean that problems can't be solved? Not at all. You *can* figure out that tricky algebra problem. You *can* come up with a solution on how to reorganize the corporation or where to vacation next year. That's because you're not trying to make the algebra problem, the corporation or your vacation disappear. But when you want something to disappear, such as stuttering, you have to take a different approach. To "disappear" something you don't solve it. You *dissolve* it. This is not just playing with words; there is a world of difference between the two approaches.

When you solve a problem, the subject continues to exist, although its form may be altered or disguised. On the other hand, when you *dissolve* it, the subject disappears because you have dismantled it (rather like you did as a child when you took apart the car you made with your Lego set and put the parts back in the box.) You have disconnected the parts so they no longer interact. You have removed the problem by destroying its structure.

Let's say that 10-year-olds Tom, Dick and Harry comprise an unruly gang whose activities you'd like to curtail. If you deal with them as a gang, you may only enjoy limited success, because the more you address the gang directly, the more you confirm its identity. But if you induce the three boys to join a youth group and assign each of them to a different activity, the gang becomes dissolved into a larger setting. The structure that defines their gang no longer prevails, because the "parts" have become disassembled and incorporated into other structures. In effect, the gang and your problems have all but disappeared.

Similarly, focusing only on stuttering (which, unfortunately, many therapy programs do) serves to entrench it within the individual's psyche, whereas disassembling it not only destroys its form but automatically gives you six issues to address instead of one. From my own experience, it was a lot more productive to stop obsessing on my speech and focus on the six parts of the stuttering system.

### *THE ROLE OF THE SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGIST*

What of the role of the therapist in this new paradigm? Does it need to change?

Some years ago, I conducted several seminars on the Stuttering Hexagon at the Tenth Annual Convention of the National Stuttering

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Project, held in Washington D.C. On the way to the airport a fellow who had attended one of my workshops popped a familiar question: "Isn't it unrealistic to expect the speech therapist to play so many different roles." It is a question that was echoed by Dr. Don Mowrer of Arizona State University in our discussions over the Internet.

As Mowrer points out, it is unlikely that the speech-language pathologist would also be a psychologist as well as be qualified to teach assertiveness and a full range of cognitive and behavioral skills. But then, neither do I expect my internist to be a qualified podiatrist, urologist, cardiologist, dermatologist and every other "ist" that I might need. My internist is most valuable as a skilled diagnostician. He may have a specialty of his own, but he is most invaluable in his understanding of how my system goes together.

Similarly, a good speech therapist needs to be an expert in speech pathology as well as be able to *recognize* the other factors that may be impacting the client's speech. Then, just like my internist, the therapist should be able to diagnose the problem and, if he or she does not have the requisite skills, be prepared to direct the client to the appropriate therapeutic resources when such qualified help is called for. But to do this, the therapist must possess an understanding of the entire stuttering system and not focus so narrowly on just the mechanics of speech.

### *SUMMARY*

For years people have searched for the genetic "glitch" that produces the stuttering block. What I'm proposing is that the speech block is actually the product of an interactive system comprising a person's physiological responses, behaviors, emotions, perceptions, beliefs, and intentions. This system is not static; rather it is a system that ebbs and flows, depending on the circumstances. And it works along the following lines:

1. All the system components of the Hexagon are in a dynamic relationship. If most of these elements are negative, they will create more negativity. Thus, even if one part of the system has become positive, such as speech that has improved after therapy, it will be under pressure by the rest of the system to drift back to its previous negative state to support the integrity of a negative system. On the other hand, if the points of the Hexagon are mostly positive, they'll create a positive system that will support any positive changes such as more expressive and fluent speech.
  2. During good speech periods, the Hexagon will be positively biased
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and support a state of physical and emotional well-being. Conversely, a failed enterprise, broken relationship or other unfortunate happenstance can cause negative changes all around the Hexagon, and those changes will be reflected in more dysfluent speech.

3. Each individual word is capable of having its own Hexagon, depending on what we associate with it and the context in which it is being used. If a person is uncomfortable with the negative feelings associated with a particular word, he may hold them back, blocking on the word to insulate himself from having to experience the associated feelings.
  4. As we speak, the mind operates like a forward-looking radar. It searches ahead for threatening words and situations, processes this information in milliseconds *on a word-by-word basis*, and takes "corrective" action in the form of a speech block. On a preconscious level, the speech block is perceived as necessary to protect the individual from harm—emotional, physical, or social.
  5. Certain situations may always seem to be biased one way or the other. For example, to understand why someone may regularly have difficulty saying his name, we must look at his perceptions, beliefs, emotions and intentions as they relate to his name.
  6. One effective way to block feelings is to block the primary vehicle through which emotion is expressed—speech. Holding one's breath and/or tightening speech-related muscles is an efficient way to bring about a speech block.
  7. Executing a Valsalva Maneuver while trying to speak will also cause a blockage of speech.
  8. *Stalling* is yet another way to avoid experiencing unwanted feelings. Stalling occurs when the person continues to repeat a word or syllable because he has a fear that he will block on the following word or syllable.
  9. *Developmental disfluency*, *bobulating* and *blocking/stalling* are all driven by different dynamics. They are not simply points on the same continuum. Thus, they require separate terminology.
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10. Making positive life changes will affect one's life Hexagon in a positive way. These changes will often be reflected in easier, more expressive speech.
11. The more points you change around the Hexagon, the greater chance you have to build a positive, self-sustaining system that leads to greater expressiveness and fluency.

Like the remote-controlled toy car we mentioned earlier, the speech block has always been perceived as a "thing", an impetuous, unpredictable life-form with a mind of its own. My own recovery from chronic stuttering truly took hold when I challenged this concept, when I "opened the hood", peered inside, and began to recognize that I was looking at a system. My physiology shaped the parts. My emotions fueled the engine. My beliefs turned the gears. My programming wired the parts together. My perceptions set the path. And my intentions drove it to move this way and that.

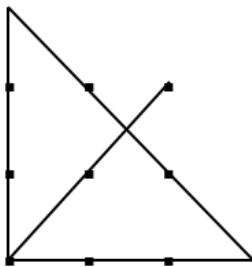
As I identified the parts and how they worked, my perception of the speech block changed, and as I made progress at each of the points, the system changed, until over time, the stuttering simply dissolved.

I don't suggest for a moment that everyone can make their speech blocks totally disappear, but by correctly recognizing the essential nature of the problem, it is possible to maximize whatever efforts are made in improving one's ability to speak.

In the next chapter we will explore the Stuttering Hexagon in greater detail.

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Answer to puzzle on page 9.





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## THE HAWTHORNE EFFECT AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO CHRONIC STUTTERING

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In 1927 the Western Electric Company at its plant in Hawthorne, Illinois, began a series of studies on the intangible factors in the work situation that affected the morale and efficiency of shopworkers—studies which Professor T. F. Gautschi of Bryant College called “perhaps the most important and influential pieces of scientific research ever done in the psychology of work.”

I remembered the Hawthorne Studies from Sociology 101; in fact, they were the only thing I ever remembered from that class. But it wasn’t until 40 years later that I suddenly realized that the Hawthorne Studies had profound meaning in the understanding of chronic stuttering.

### *UNDERSTANDING THE HAWTHORNE EFFECT*

A little history. The Hawthorne plant was the manufacturing arm for the telephone companies of the Bell System. It employed over 29,000 men and women in the manufacture of telephones, central office equipment, loading coils, telephone wire, lead-covered cable, toll cable, and other forms of telephone apparatus.

In the mid-1920s, the Hawthorne plant undertook a series of studies to investigate how it could improve worker output. In particular, the company was interested in discovering whether manipulating the lighting, break schedules, and other workplace conditions would lead to higher production. It was thought that even slight improvements could have significant impact on the company’s bottom line because of the enormous volume of products that the plant turned out for the Bell network.

One of the earliest experiments involved a group of six women from the coil winding production line. These volunteers were pulled from the line and relocated into a smaller room where various elements of the environment could be manipulated.

The first experiment looked at whether changing the intensity of the lighting in the working environment would have a positive impact on production. The experimenters started out with the same lighting intensity the workers were used to on the production line. They then increased the light a few candlepower.

Production went up.

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Pleased with the results, they increased the room light by another few candlepower.

Production went up again.

Now, quite confident that they were on to something, they continued to increase the room lighting a little bit more each time until the illumination in the room was several times the normal intensity. At each increment of change, the production of the six women continued to rise.

At this point, the researchers felt a need to validate their hypothesis that better lighting was responsible for the increased output, so they brought the lighting intensity back to the original starting point and dropped it by a few candlepower.

To their surprise, production continued to go up.

Was this a fluke? Simultaneously bothered and intrigued, the research team reduced the lighting by another couple of candlepower, and sure enough, production continued to rise. They continued to reduce the illumination in the room until the women were working in the dimmest of light. At each lower lighting increment, production was still a little bit higher, and it continued to rise until the lighting was so dim that the women could barely see their work. At that point, their output began to level off.

What was going on?

It was clearly not an improvement in lighting that increased production, especially since production continued to rise in the face of less favorable lighting conditions. After testing numerous other environmental factors, the answer emerged. Although these changes in the work environment did have some lesser effect, the reason for the higher production lay in the fact that bringing the workers together allowed them to coalesce into a cohesive group, and it was the creation of this group dynamic that had a profound effect on the mindset and output of each individual group member.

To better understand what happened, let's look more closely at the differences between the two work environments and how these differences impacted the women in the coil winding room. While they were just nameless cogs on the production line, the workers lacked any sense of importance. They had few meaningful associations with their co-workers. Their relationship with their boss was primarily adversarial. He (and it was always a "he") was the whip cracker, exhorting them to work harder and faster. There was little personal responsibility for turning out a quality product. Someone else set the standards, and they just performed according to instructions. There was not much pride in what they did.

It was, to conjure up a familiar phrase, just a job.

But all this changed when the six women were pulled from the production line and given their own private workspace. From the very beginning they basked in the attention paid to them by the research team. Each of the women was not just an impersonal face on the

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production line. She was now a “somebody.”

Because the women were organized into a small group, it was easier to communicate with one another, and friendships blossomed. The women began to socialize after hours, visiting each other’s homes, and often joining one another in after hours recreational activities.

The relationship with their immediate supervisor also underwent a transformation. Instead of being a feared boss, the supervisor became someone they could turn to, someone who knew them by name, and who was likely to pay them a compliment if they were doing well. He was also someone that each woman could appeal to directly if there were a problem to be addressed. A group identification formed, and with it, a pride in what they were able to accomplish. All these factors contributed to the higher performance levels of the group.

The coil winding room study was just one of many experiments conducted over a five year period. The results of the Hawthorne Studies were eventually recorded in detail and published in a 600-page book by a professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Business Administration and two senior management executives at Western Electric Company’s Hawthorne Works. Of the various conclusions drawn, perhaps the most significant was this—that one could understand the positive improvements only by looking at each work group from the perspective of a social system. In short, it was not any one thing that accounted for the improved performance of the women in the coil winding room. It wasn’t the lighting or other physical changes in the working environment, although some of these changes undoubtedly helped. The improvements that took place were primarily explained by the impact of the social system that formed and the ways in which it impacted the performance of each individual group member. In a concluding chapter of the study, the authors commented that:

*The work activities of this group, together with their satisfactions and dissatisfactions, had to be viewed as manifestations of a complex pattern of interrelations.*

Over time, this phenomenon came to be known as the Hawthorne Effect.

## **THE HAWTHORNE EFFECT AND CHRONIC STUTTERING**

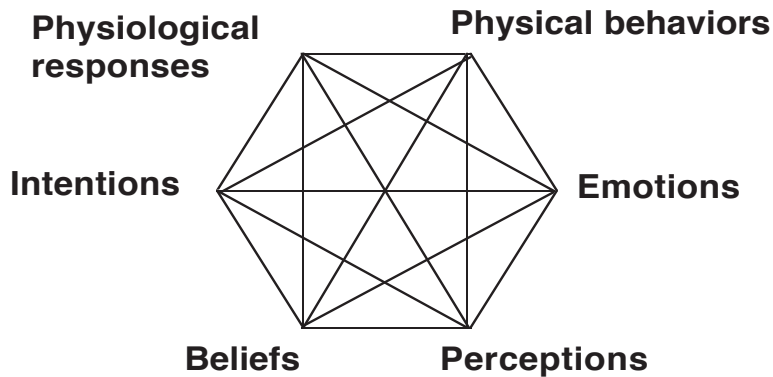
I was particularly excited when I came upon the Hawthorne Effect, because the words used by the authors were almost identical to the words I had used to describe the phenomenon of stuttering. The authors described the relationships in the coil winding room as a system,

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“which must be considered as a whole because each part bears a relation of interdependence to every other part.”

Similarly, in the previous essay I wrote that stuttering can be more accurately understood as an interactive system comprising at least six

## THE STUTTERING HEXAGON



essential components—behaviors, emotions, perceptions, beliefs, intentions, and physiological responses.

In this model, each point affects, and can be affected by, every other point, so that a change anywhere will be felt at every point throughout the network, like a drop of water falling upon a spider’s web.

This system perspective, however, is not an easy concept for many people to accept, especially those who like simple explanations.

## A MULTIFACETED PROBLEM

It is tempting to look for the single cause of stuttering, because casting it as a unitary problem makes it easier to address. There are researchers who believe that stuttering is caused by some glitch in the brain and have dedicated their lives to finding that cerebral anomaly. There are others who believe that stuttering is an emotional problem. Or a timing problem. Or some other kind of unitary problem. Martin Schwartz in his book *Stuttering Solved* even postulated that one day, people will be able to make their stuttering disappear, simply by taking a pill.

Their thinking is similar to that of the four blind men who tried to describe an elephant by each grabbing onto a different part of the beast—the trunk, leg, ear, tail. The first portrayed the elephant as squirmy and snakelike while the second described it as round and firm as a tree. The third blind man described the elephant as broad and thin as

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a palm leaf, while the fourth concluded it was small and rope-like. People will shape their thinking according to the limited way they view the subject at hand. What confuses the issue is that each person is partially correct because, like the four blind men, each is able to accurately describe a piece of the puzzle.

Let's say that someone decided that the six Hawthorne workers in the coil winding room improved their performance because they developed a better emotional attitude toward their work. This presumption would have been correct. There was no way the women could feel better toward management, their work, and each other without first undergoing a shift in attitude. Yet, it was more than their positive emotions that contributed to the change.

Their *beliefs* about management and about themselves also underwent a positive shift. Management was no longer seen as indifferent or exploitative, but instead, supportive and nurturing. Similarly, the way they *perceived* their boss changed dramatically. They no longer saw the relationship as a we/they relationship but as an "us" relationship. Efforts at improvement were seen as being in everyone's best interests, and the manager was now perceived as a good guy who was interested in and concerned about their well being. Their *intentions* were transformed as they began to build pride in the ability of their small group to turn out more product per person than the workers on the plant floor. They didn't get angry and gripe as much, thus reducing any *physiological stress reactions* that could interfere with their work. All of these factors played upon each other and established a different social system which, in turn, led to a different set of behaviors.

Emotions were involved, to be sure, but only as a contributing factor. The women's improved satisfaction and performance came about as by-products of the Hawthorne Effect in which their emotions, perceptions, beliefs, intentions, and physiological responses all interacted *as a system* to create a different work experience. Anyone who tried to understand what was going on by focusing on only one aspect of the system would not have a broad enough purview to make sense of things.

Let us see how the Hawthorne Effect applies to stuttering, and in particular, to the varying degrees of success that people have in speech therapy.

## *THE DYNAMICS OF THE THERAPEUTIC RELATIONSHIP*

Back in the mid-60's I read a book called *Client-Centered Therapy* by psychologist Carl Rogers, a book which for me couldn't have come along at a more favorable time. I had for two years been undergoing a three-time-a-week psychoanalysis that seemed to be having little effect. Then

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I read Rogers' book, and it offered me some perspective on why I was not benefiting from the therapy.

In *Client-Centered Therapy*, Rogers proposed that it wasn't because the therapist was Freudian or Jungian or some other "ian" that the client was able to make progress. Rather, it was the client's perception of the *quality* of the relationship between himself (or herself) and the therapist that worked its magic—how much trust, support and self-esteem were created.

Rogers' therapeutic methodology was simple. The therapist would simply reflect back in a supportive, caring way what the client had just said. If the client experienced that support and care as genuine, he or she would feel accepted and safe enough to move onto the next issue that needed to be explored. And very slowly, petal-by-petal, the person would unfold like a flower as more of his or her hidden fears, feelings, and beliefs came to the surface where they could be addressed.

This was precisely what was *not* happening in my relationship with the psychoanalyst. I knew that psychoanalysts weren't supposed to react, but even so, you can usually get a feeling for whether or not a person has some emotional connection with you. I think what made the relationship unproductive was that we didn't really connect as people. That sense of being liked and accepted—something that might have helped me get in touch with what I was feeling—was missing. I eventually terminated the relationship with the psychoanalyst—one of the better decisions I've ever made.

So what does this have to do with speech therapy?

In my opinion, everything. What I propose is that it's not just the various fluency techniques employed by the therapist that account for the individual's improved speech. At best, the fluency techniques will correct certain behaviors that are counterproductive to effortless speech; at worst, they will layer another level of control over an already overcontrolled way of speaking. Rather, it is the speech related therapy *plus* the impact of the Hawthorne Effect (the relationship between clinician and client) that leads to progress.

## AN ILLUSTRATION

Let's set up a hypothetical situation. Let's say that, as someone with a stuttering problem, you decide to work with a speech pathologist—we'll call him Bob—who has set up a two week intensive program for a half dozen clients and is holding it at a local conference center. You'll not only attend the program, you'll also live at the center during that time.

In addition, let us say that Bob employs a fluency shaping approach which involves hours of practice on a voice monitor during the first week that will tell you when you are tensing the muscles in your vocal folds. In that first week you will also learn a whole lot about how speech is

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produced so that you can visualize the process in your mind. The second week will then be spent using the technique in real-world situations, such as on the telephone and on the street.

At the end of the first week, you begin to see real progress. You have now demystified your stuttering by learning what's going on in your voice box when you speak as well as when you block. And because of the electronic feedback, you can now distinguish the difference between tight and relaxed vocal folds, something you were not aware of before. All this is proving very helpful.

But is that all that is going on?

Not really. There's a lot more, and it relates to the Hawthorne Effect.

Because Bob is an open and accepting person, for the first time, you feel totally self-accepted, even during difficult speaking situations. Virtually every communication between you and Bob is designed, not just to pass along information, but to bolster your self-esteem. Every piece of constructive feedback is accompanied by a positive statement that reinforces your sense of self. Bob listens attentively to all your concerns and shows infinite patience in exploring the issues with you. Nothing you say is ever devalued. Your relationship with the other students is equally supportive.

In this totally eupsychian (i.e., good for the psyche) environment, your sense of self begins to change. Not only is your speech changing, so are your self-confidence, your self-image, and your self-limiting beliefs. You are more willing to express what you feel. All these new, positive changes begin to organize themselves into a more upbeat and empowering system that reinforces and supports your new speech behaviors. As you keep at it, the various elements of the new system continue to reinforce one another.

And lo and behold, by the end of the two-week program, the system has become self-supporting.

### *LIKE RIDING A BICYCLE*

If you stop and think of it, establishing a self-supporting system is hardly a totally unique experience for any of us. Remember when you first learned to ride a bicycle? My memories of it are still vivid. My father helped me learn by running alongside me on the street, holding the bike upright as I pedaled. Back and forth we'd go. I can remember after a couple of days thinking that I'd never get it. In fact, I didn't even know what the "it" was that I was looking for. The goal seemed totally unattainable. But my body was learning on an unconscious level. And little by little, I began to get the vaguest sense of what it would feel like to be able to stay upright without assistance.

I remember the day it finally came together. This particular afternoon

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I took my bike into the driveway and parked it next to the front gate. I got on the bike, using the gate to prop myself up. Then I pushed off. My subconscious mind must have been processing the previous experiences outside of my awareness, because suddenly my body knew how to stay upright. Everything came together, just like that.

“Wow,” I thought. “This is what riding a bike is all about.”

This is similar to the changes that take place in a therapeutic relationship that is truly eupsychian. The skills you acquire and the personal ways in which you change during the learning process all start working together, and a different reality is created.

Not just your speech is transformed.

*You* are transformed.

## *SLIDING BACK*

Then why, unlike riding a bicycle, is there a such a tendency to slip backward after speech therapy? Why do so many people find themselves struggling with the same old speech problems in a matter of weeks or months. Once again, it has to do with the Hawthorne Effect.

Let’s return to the women in the coil winding room. One of the questions that was never answered was—“What happened when the experiment ended and the six women were returned to their regular jobs on the production line. Did they continue to perform at their new, higher levels?”

I doubt it.

In the beginning, they might have kept up their higher production rates. The new emotions, perceptions, beliefs, and intentions would have continued to reinforce each another for a period of time. But without the continual reinforcement of a supportive environment, the women would have gradually and unconsciously readapted to the old environment—one that did not encourage initiative and was not personal, an environment that promoted an adversarial relationship between worker and manager. In the end, the women would have become once again “just workers.” And their production would have fallen.

Similarly, the client who leaves the clinician’s office must now step into a world where the people he encounters are not focused on building his self-esteem and who may fail to exhibit infinite patience while he struggles with his speech-related issues. People in the outer world can be hurried, insensitive, uninformed, and inwardly focused on their own personal agenda. Even worse, the client may have to go back into a family environment where family members are non-expressive, judgmental, and insensitive to his needs.

Since the new, positive internal system he’s built up in the therapist’s office is still very tentative and fragile, it is easy for it to break down due

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to a lack of support. Suddenly the client who has been making such excellent strides in the therapist's office is paralyzed and unable to speak when he gets back to his home or office. The speech techniques that he's worked so hard to acquire seem too difficult to use in the face of the panic that arises in particular speaking situations. The risks become overwhelming, and he (or she) retreats back into the old familiar speech patterns.

There are many speech clinicians who are fully convinced that the improved fluency of their clients is due primarily to their success with a particular fluency technique. These practitioners fall into the same trap that the Hawthorne researchers initially did in attempting to explain the improved performance of the ladies in the coil winding room. Had the researchers never attempted to validate their findings by lowering the lights in the work room, they might have easily concluded that the improved performance was solely caused by brightening the lights. Similarly, the clinician who focuses only on fluency shaping techniques might conclude that improvements are solely the result of those techniques and overlook the impact of the relationship between herself and the client.

In both examples of the plant workers and the stutterer in therapy, the Hawthorne Effect plays a major role—and in many cases *the* major role—in any rise or decline in performance. The greater challenge, then, lies in how to make self-sustaining the new emotions, perceptions, beliefs, intentions, and behaviors, even in the face of an unfriendly environment.

## *UNDERSTANDING THE DEFAULT SETTINGS*

Right now, I'm working on my Macintosh computer and using a popular word processor called Microsoft Word. Every time I open a new Word file, the screen defaults to particular document settings. The margins of every new document are automatically set to 0 inches on the left and 6 inches on the right. The type face is always Times Roman 14 point. The tabs are set every quarter inch up to one inch, and every half inch thereafter. The text is flush left and ragged right. These are the document's default settings, and every new file that I open has those settings already preset. There's nothing I have to do.

But if I like, I can change those settings in any document I choose. Let's say I begin another new document. I can use the various pull-down menus to change the type face to Helvetica 12 point. I can justify the type left and right and slide the margins to 1.5 inches on the left and 5 inches on the right. I can set the far left tab to half an inch. Everything I type in that file thereafter will be formatted according to those parameters.

However, when I close that document and open a third new file, it

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defaults to the settings of the first document.

Why is that? Why didn't the third document set up like the second one? After all, the second document contained the most recent stylistic changes.

The answer is—I didn't change the default.

To change the default in Microsoft Word, there is something else I have to do. I have to open the menu that allows me to set up different text styles. I choose my new settings. Then I click on a box that says "Use as default." Once I do this, then not just the next document but *every new Word document I open* will have those characteristics I have just selected. I have reset the default.

The way my word processor works is analogous to the way the human psyche works. Let us say that you've been regularly seeing a speech-language pathologist. On this particular day, you feel like you've made great progress. There's hardly been a single block. Because of the therapist's concern, support, patience, and understanding, you find it easy to speak as you respond to her accepting presence.

Then you leave her office and step out into the street.

You have entered a new environment. (This would be analogous to opening a new file.) You walk to the bus stop and wait for the bus to take you home. The bus arrives, you pay your fare, and then it's time to ask the driver for a transfer.

Ah, the "t" word. You have a particular fear of such words. Dozens, no, *hundreds* of times, you've found yourself at the front of a line asking for a transfer with your tongue stuck to the roof of your mouth. Why, after having such an easy time of it in the therapists office, when "t" words dripped from your mouth without effort like drops from a leaky faucet, *why* are you suddenly stuck on the word "transfer?"

It is the overwhelming tensions of the moment that have caused you to slip back. Though you've made significant progress with the therapist, the new perceptions, beliefs, and speech behaviors have not yet gathered enough strength to become the default. They have yet to organize themselves into a self-supporting system—one that is strong enough to withstand the pressures of the outside world.

Let us look more closely at the various defaults and the way they are structured to work together. As described in a previous essay ("Introducing a New Paradigm for Stuttering"), I've observed that there are six elements to the stuttering system that must be viewed as manifestations of a complex pattern of interrelations. I call this system the Stuttering Hexagon.

Each of these points has its own default settings. And if you cannot get the defaults to change, you cannot create a new self-reinforcing system.

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## DEFAULT #1: EMOTIONS

There are certain negative feelings that people will go out of their way to avoid—fear, helplessness, embarrassment, anger, and vulnerability are among the obvious that come to mind. Strong emotions can trigger the type of normal disfluency I call “bobulating,” a coined word for the breakdown in language that occurs when people are upset, confused, or discombobulated. But bobulating is not the same as the blocking behavior that characterizes chronic stuttering and does not come with the same emotional baggage. In fact, people bobulate all the time and don’t even realize they’re doing it. It is only when they actually cannot speak, no matter how hard they try, that panic sets in. The default in this case has to do with how much and what kind of emotion we’re willing to tolerate.

Let’s take the example of a girl who has difficulty expressing what she feels in personal relationships. There are a variety of feelings—anger, hurt, fear of abandonment—that she will not allow herself to experience. What she is willing or not willing to be in touch with is the default setting for her feelings. Let’s see the various ways in which this default is likely to show up.

- *Jane has mixed emotions about breaking up with her boyfriend. On one hand, she feels smothered by the relationship. On the other hand, she feels the boy is emotionally dependent on her and will be destroyed if she leaves him. It’s a no-win situation for her. The evening comes when she wants to tell him she’s leaving the relationship, but the thought of actually saying this to her boyfriend is so frightening that when she goes break the bad news, she blocks on almost every word. And what she does say is said without much feeling.*
  - *Jane’s boss wants to give her a new work assignment, one that she does not feel ready for. She wants to turn the job down. She would like to say, “Can I take a pass on this?” but her fear of being a “bad” person keeps her from expressing her feelings. Yet, she has to talk. The need to assert herself brings up stress. It also brings her back in touch with all the unexpressed feelings with her boyfriend. Her default response is to push away that stress and panic so she does not have to experience it, and she ends up by holding herself back by blocking on the word “can.”*
  - *Jane stops at the local service station to fill her tank. She pulls up to the full service pump, and the attendant comes*
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*over to help her. There's something about the setting that feels like an unresolved power struggle, and this brings up uncomfortable feelings. On one hand, she's in command. It's her car. It's her purchase. As the customer, she's in charge. Yet, she does not feel as if she's in charge. There is an attendant, a man, standing there waiting for her. What are his expectations? What does he want her to do? What does he expect from her? At this moment, her relationship with the attendant is a patchwork of all the unexpressed thoughts and feelings she carries around with her. The attendant is simply a straw man onto which all her emotional baggage has been projected. When the attendant asks, "What'll it be?" she projects these issues onto the situation at hand. She goes to say, "Fill it up," but suddenly finds herself blocked on the word "fill."*

In each case, Jane blocks herself from saying the feared word (which, had she said it, would have intensified her emotions) until it no longer feels that expressing her feelings would propel her outside her safety zone.

## **DEFAULT #2: BELIEFS**

We all have particular beliefs about who we are, who other people are, and how they expect us to act. Do we believe we are worthy? Do we believe we have the right to speak up for what we want? Do we always have to be right? Do we have to be perfect? Do we believe that if someone speaks authoritatively, that they automatically know the truth? Do we believe that every time we stand in class or ask a stranger a question or talk to a parent or teacher that we are going to be judged? Beliefs can either work for or against us. Beliefs, in and of themselves, don't create speech blocks, but they help to form the mindset in which speech blocks occur—a mindset that can encourage us to hold back and avoid expressing what we think and feel, or one in which spontaneous self-expression is accepted and valued.

Where do these beliefs come from?

They are established two ways.

First, they are created by what happens to us and how we interpret it. Secondly, beliefs are imbued in us by parents, teachers, and other authorities whose word we accept as law. Whether these "authorities" know and speak the truth is another matter. Almost always, their version of reality is a distortion, if only because it is filtered through their own set of beliefs about the ways things are. No matter. If we see them as wise and knowing adults, and if they tell us the world is this way, then as young children, we are likely to buy what they say without questioning.

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When these beliefs become all encompassing and all-pervasive—when they so totally surround us that they become as invisible as the air we breathe—we will not be able to see them to challenge them. But sometimes, there is a crack in the system. It can be an experience, a relationship, an unexpected happening that suddenly pulls that behavior out of the background and makes it visible. Sometimes, just challenging one's basic beliefs can have a stunning and dramatic effect.

This is what happened to the young man in the following story who had spent his entire life living conforming to an image of the “good boy.” The young man was a client of William Perkins, Ph.D., former director of the Stuttering Center at the University of Southern California, who says this was the only person he's ever known who started out as a severe stutterer and suddenly underwent a spontaneous recovery. Perkins recalls:

*A young, handsome, successful architect who still lived with his mother, he had never had a date. He was a gentle, grateful, soft-spoken giant who women found very attractive, but who was too timid to pursue their interest.*

*Our sessions were on Monday and Thursday evenings. They dealt frequently with the restrictions he felt stuttering imposed upon him. For several weeks, I had been countering with the observation that he might be hiding behind stuttering. He would thank me profusely each time, as he would back out the door.*

*About a half year later, after what I thought had been a typical session at his one-word-per-minute rate, I remember thinking as he left how stark the contrast was between his immaculately groomed appearance when silent and his chaotic appearance when struggling to speak.*

*I was totally unprepared for what happened next. It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience, literally. I hardly recognized him when he arrived for his next session. He looked as if he had been hit by a truck. He was utterly disheveled, unshaved, uncombed, distraught, with gray bags under his eyes, and wrinkled clothes looking as if they had been slept in, which they had.*

*Equally shocking was his agitation. He seemed calm, usually, except when speaking. But not this time. He was in a state of acute anxiety. His agitation and appearance were shocking enough. What was even more shocking was his speech; he was completely fluent.*

*He had gone to bed as usual after our Thursday meeting. He reported no inkling of what was about to happen. He called his office Friday morning, which was his customary technique*

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*for assessing how severe his stuttering was going to be. To his amazement, there was no stuttering. He felt that heaven had opened and granted his lifelong wish. Still, he knew it wouldn't last, so he stayed home that day in order to call every friend he could think of. He wanted to enjoy his fluency while it lasted.*

*When he awakened Saturday, he expected to be stuttering again except that he was not. He was still fluent, so he began to experiment to see if he could stutter. He could not. By bed time, apprehension had set in. He fully expected this bonanza to end, but what if it did not? He had no idea how to cope with such uncharted territory.*

*Sunday picked up where Saturday left off. Now he was truly frightened at the prospect of not being able to stutter. By Sunday night, he said he felt as if he was "stark naked in Times Square." He stayed in a state of stutter-free high anxiety for a month. My only clue to the next turn of events was his dwindling gratitude for my observations.*

*As anxiety subsided, a personality inversion appeared. Gone, along with stuttering, was Mister Nice Guy. Instead of gratitude, my even looking as if I was going to make an observation set off snarling responses. He took an apartment, bought a Thunderbird convertible, and set about conquering the female population of Los Angeles. About two years into this spree, one of his conquests conquered him. (From *Tongue Wars* by William H. Perkins, published by Athens Press, Inc. Reprinted with permission.)*

In this case, the startling transformation was apparently prompted by a realization, perhaps built up over time through therapy, that the young man no longer had to govern his life according to other people's expectations. He no longer had to maintain his traditional beliefs of the goody-good who kept his wild, seething, dynamic self in chains. At some point this realization reached "critical mass," and there was a perceptual shift. He no longer had to hold back who he was and what he felt.

Lo and behold, he created another default that gave him a lot more room to maneuver and to act in a way that was congruent with his authentic self.

### **DEFAULT #3: PERCEPTIONS**

The third set of defaults that control our stuttering has to do with our perceptions. Talk to five people who have witnessed an auto accident, and you're likely to get five different versions of what happened. People's perceptions are shaped by their expectations, prejudices, predisposi-

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tions, and how they felt when they got up that morning.

People often confuse perceptions and beliefs, so let's take a moment to distinguish between the two.

Beliefs are fixed expectations of the way things are or will be. For example:

*Women are poor drivers.*

*I will stutter whenever I have to give my name.*

*George is a good person.*

*Saturn is a car company that cares about people.*

Beliefs can persist in the face of contradictory evidence. For example, as a Saturn owner, you may have an unpleasant experience at the dealership when you go to get your car serviced. Perhaps the mechanic forgets to change your oil or maybe you are charged for work that was not actually completed. Yet, you still believe that the company cares about its customers and that your unpleasant encounter with the service department was just a notable exception.

A perception, on the other hand, is something that takes place right now, in real time.

*The sales clerk is laughing at me.*

*It's clear that person is confident by the way he talks.*

*She's really beautiful.*

*When I blocked, the person I was chatting with became embarrassed.*

There is obviously a close link between beliefs and perceptions in that what you believe sets the context for how you perceive, and how you perceive influences how you react. Here are some examples:

- A girl who is anorexic looks at her gaunt frame in the mirror and to her, she appears normal. This perception is her default. Adding a pound or two will trigger fears of becoming fat and will set off a round of purging to remove the unwanted pounds.
- A woman is hypersensitive to criticism and believes that in order to be loved, she has to always be perfect. Her focus on her many "imperfections" is her default.
- A man has a soft voice, so soft that others have difficulty hearing him. Yet, to him, his volume is normal, and any rise in volume is perceived as being offensively loud. His thin voice is his default.

Wherever our perceptions automatically migrate to—whether it's to other people's strengths or our own weaknesses—this is our default.

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## DEFAULT #4: INTENTIONS

Intentions play a key role in the creation of a speech block. To better understand this, let's create a non-speech-related situation in which a person finds himself blocked.

*George has a favorite horse named Dancer whom he's owned for fifteen years. George loves the horse; in fact, George has raised it from a colt. One day he saddles up the horse and goes for a ride in the country. While riding across a rocky area where the footing is tenuous, the horse is suddenly startled by a rattlesnake. Dancer bolts, trips, and to George's horror, breaks his leg.*

*It is a severe break and cannot be repaired. The horse is in pain. And regrettably, there is no question about the most humane course of action.*

*In George's saddle bag he has a pistol that he's taken along for protection against snakes and other wildlife. The horse is lying on the ground in obvious agony. George stands in front of the horse, pistol in hand, and points the gun at a spot between his eyes. George goes to pull the trigger, but his finger freezes. He cannot get it to move. He cannot get himself to kill one of his best friends.*

*At this moment, George's intentions are divided. He has his gun pointed at Dancer's head. He knows he has to pull the trigger, yet his finger freezes because once he pulls it, a beautiful 15-year relationship will be ended—forever! For a period of time, the compulsion to pull the trigger and not to pull the trigger are equally balanced.*

*George is blocked.*

As you can see, a block is comprised of two forces of equal strength that pull in opposite directions. George can't move one way. He can't move the other.

How can he get past the block? There are two options, and either will allow him to break out of his bind.

- George can choose not to shoot the horse and therefore spare himself the pain of terminating the relationship. Of course, then he'll have to deal with other issues.
- George can choose to feel whatever painful emotions come up, and having made that conscious and deliberate commitment, pull the trigger and put the horse to sleep.

Any block, speech or otherwise, can be defined in this way: two forces of equal strength that pull in opposite directions. There's nothing mysteri-

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ous about it.

Now let's make it mysterious by adding a twist. Let's say, for the sake of argument, that George *doesn't know* he has deep feelings for the horse. The feelings are there, all right, but for whatever reason, he's pushed them away, so far away that the emotions are no longer accessible to his conscious awareness. Once again, George raises the pistol and takes aim at the horse's head. He goes to pull the trigger.

His finger won't move. He tries again.

It seems frozen.

How can this be? Is there some mysterious anomaly in his brain that is causing this. It seems so, because his frozen finger cannot be explained.

The real reason, of course, is that George doesn't *want* to pull the trigger at this instant. He's not ready to experience the pain. But he doesn't know this, and this is why his finger seems mysteriously blocked.

The same kind of situation can arise in speech. You want to talk at the same time that you have feelings that threaten to push you beyond the threshold of what you are willing to experience. So you hold back, and for a period of time, the forces are equally balanced. If this becomes your *modus operandi* in stressful speaking situations, then this method of self expression will be your default, and you will find yourself routinely slipping into stuttering and blocking behaviors that seem unexplainable.

## *DEFAULT #5: PHYSIOLOGICAL RESPONSES*

Your body has been genetically programmed to initiate a fight-or-flight reaction whenever your physical survival is threatened. This programming is part of your "old" brain that evolved millions of years ago. Designed to give you added strength in any situation where your physical safety was at stake, the flight-or-flight response could be triggered by any number of things, such as an ominous rumbling in the tall grass, an indication that a predator was lurking close by, ready to pounce.

The lightning-like changes that took place in your body would have given you additional strength to fight the beast or fuel your escape. Adrenaline would have poured your blood stream. Your blood pressure would have risen, and blood would have rushed from your stomach into your limbs to give you added strength to fight or flee. But as you stand at the head of the bus line trying to say the word "transfer," running or fighting are not appropriate options. Your physical survival is not at stake. After all, you're simply asking for a transfer. Yet, your whole body is still preparing you for a life-or-death struggle.

Well, surprise. Your survival *is* at stake.

What is threatened are your self-image and your self-esteem. ("I'm so humiliated, I'm going to die.")

The reason such an extreme physical reaction is initiated is that your

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genetic programming has not kept pace with the changes wrought by civilization. Consequently, it cannot distinguish between surviving an attack of a saber-toothed tiger and surviving the stares of the other impatient people in line when you cannot say the word "transfer." In both instances, it feels like you're going to die, and your body reacts accordingly.

This fight-or-flight reaction goes a long way to answering the question of whether there is a genetic component to stuttering. There are those who believe that there's a place in the brain that causes stuttering, and that if we could only find a way to correct it, we wouldn't stutter.

I have difficulty with that. If the speech block that lies at the heart of chronic stuttering existed as a unitary element, I suppose we could eventually find that part of the brain in which it resides. But in my opinion, this is chasing moon dust, considering that the Hawthorne Effect can explain even the most bazaar stuttering behavior. What part of stuttering is genetic? Is it my fear of letting go? I don't think so. Is it my strategy to outwait the block or push through it? That seems unlikely, too.

Then how do you explain the anomalies that show up in the brain scans of people who stutter? To me, it seems just common sense that if there are subliminal rises in feeling and other changes associated with a sudden and severe stress reaction, that these changes will be recorded in various areas of the brain.

However, I think genetics does play a part. Let me mention one area where I'm sure this is so.

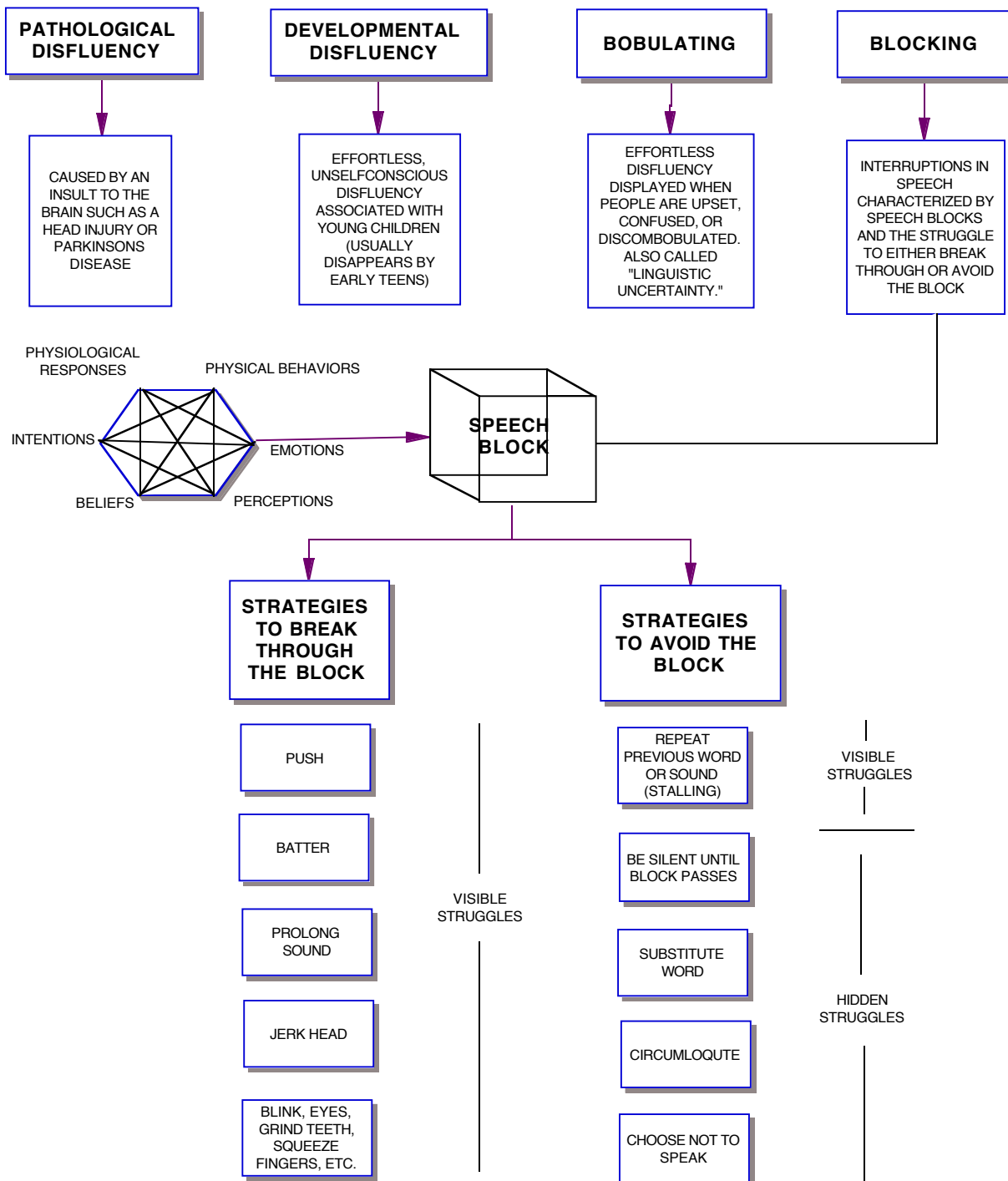
In the April 1998 issue of the National Stuttering Project's monthly newsletter *Letting GO*, there was an article by Mary Elizabeth Oyler, Ph.D. entitled "Sensitivity and Vulnerability: Are They a Blessing?" The article was based on Dr. Oyler's doctoral thesis which looked at the relationships between sensitivity, vulnerability, and stuttering. To quote Dr. Oyler:

*My research compared 25 stuttering to 25 nonstuttering school-aged children matched on gender and age. The group of stuttering children revealed significantly greater sensitivity and vulnerability than the group of nonstuttering children. There was also a close relationship between sensitivity and vulnerability. Those who were vulnerable seemed to be more sensitive and responsive to all stimuli, especially to being bombarded by negative stimuli. This may suggest a certain neurogenic and developmental fragility....*

*Because stuttering individuals with a hypersensitive temperament require less stimuli for responsiveness and reaction, they may be oversensitive to the negative reactions of other people and be more sensitive to stress, time-pressure, and noise. This hypersensitivity may also cause them to react more strongly to their*

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## THE VARIOUS KINDS OF STUTTERING



*own stuttering. This was what I identified in my own personal experience.*

This makes perfect sense to me. It is also compatible with what I know to be true about the Hawthorne Effect and its impact on stuttering. If the speech block lies at the heart of the problem, and if one of the key elements of the Stuttering Hexagon is the individual's physiological responses, then it stands to reason that with our increased sensitivity, we will be more disposed to creating a stressful environment where struggled speech is likely to occur.

## **DEFAULT #6: PHYSICAL BEHAVIORS**

Earlier in this essay, I proposed that the Hawthorne Effect could not only explain the mindset that underlies chronic stuttering, but that it can also describe the creation of the speech block, itself. Now I'd like to attempt to pay that off.

What I have observed is that stuttering (the kind of stuttering where people lock up and cannot speak) is comprised of two components: the speech block and the strategy to break through or avoid the block.

The *speech block* is characterized by a clamping of one or more parts of the mechanisms required for speech (tongue, lips, vocal folds, chest) in a way that leaves the speaker unable to continue talking. The speech block is distinguished from bobulating and developmental disfluency by an accompanying feeling of helplessness.

The block is created by an individual's emotions, perceptions, beliefs, intentions, physiological responses, and speech behaviors that have all been woven together by the Hawthorne Effect into a patterned response. None of these elements in and of themselves creates stuttering; rather, the block is created by the way these elements interact and reinforce one another.

The different varieties of stuttering are really strategies that the individual adopts in order to break through or avoid the block. Note that these strategies are not necessary when someone is simply bobulating, since the person does not feel blocked and is unlikely to even be aware of his or her disfluencies. It is important to make this distinction between bobulating and blocking, because many speech therapists are unaware of what is going on inside their client and may be quick to lump the two kinds of disfluency together, when in actuality, they could not be more different.

In the "schematic" of stuttering on page 53 you can more clearly see the differences between the various types of disfluency and the particular strategies that people develop for handling their speech blocks.

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## THE HAWTHORNE EFFECT IN ACTION

Now I'd like to illustrate the various ways that the Hawthorne Effect operates in a situation that should be familiar to anyone who stutters. We'll create a vignette of a young woman who walks to the local meat market to buy some salmon.

Sally is an executive in her late 20s who works as a marketing manager with a high tech company. She is always well dressed and stylishly coiffed and places a high priority on presenting a professional image. Sally also stutters, and she has a particularly hard time with words beginning with "s." Because she is so image-conscious, she refuses to resort to overt struggle behavior. Whenever she feels herself about to block, she simply pretends that she's trying to remember what she wants to say until she feels confident she'll be able to say the feared word.

From the moment she puts on her coat and leaves home, Sally starts worrying about whether or not she'll be able to say "salmon." Unlike the professional golfer who takes a few moments to visualize a successful drive before walking up to address the ball, Sally is caught up in doing just the opposite—visualizing how she *doesn't want* to speak. Not surprisingly, by the time she enters the market, the original concern has escalated into a major fear.

Focusing on her fear would be good logic if she were walking alone in the downtown district after midnight. Considering the recent reports of late night street crime, it would make sense to stay alert to the potential danger so she could be ready to run at a moment's notice.

But picturing what she's afraid of is precisely the wrong strategy to adopt in overcoming a performance fear. What Sally doesn't realize is that whatever she pictures in her conscious mind, her subconscious mind will attempt to execute. (For a more complete discussion of the nature of performance fears and especially, how our emotions and behaviors are programmed by the way we think, I would refer to you the classic book *Psycho-Cybernetics* by Maxwell Maltz and to the many interesting publications on neurolinguistic programming (NLP).

To counter the fear, she has to fill her mind with positive images and experiences. But why is this so hard? Why is it so difficult *not* to focus on the fear when she has to ask for salmon?

It has to do with genetic programming.

Whenever we are faced with a threat, nature has programmed us to feel fearful and vulnerable. This is to make sure that we will stay alert and deal with the threat. If you don't believe this, try and not notice the nasty looking centipede walking across the floor towards you. Dispatching the centipede may be scary, but it's even more scary to ignore it and focus your attention elsewhere. In Sally's case, all she can do is obsess on the fear of blocking, because not to do so would give her the feeling that "Something is going to get me if I don't pay attention to it." It's a feeling she

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is unwilling to tolerate.

Thus, there are two *beliefs* at work: (1) she is going to block, and (2) she has to keep focusing on the threat.

As Sally walks into the store, her body begins to initiate a *fight-or-flight reaction* to prepare her for the crisis. It starts in little ways—a slight elevation in heartbeat, a subtle tightening in her throat or chest, a shallowness in her breathing. Sally is not consciously aware that these things are happening. All she knows is that she has an unspecified *feeling* that she's going to block.

As Sally waits her turn in line, she starts *believing* that she will make a total fool of herself by not being able to say the word "salmon." This belief, in turn, begins to shape her *perceptions*. The frown on the clerk behind the meat counter says that he's not having a good day, that he's rushed, that he's intolerant of anyone who would cause a delay. The two girls chatting in line behind her seem superficial and judgmental. They will probably laugh or snicker when they discover she can't speak. She desperately looks for friendly faces around her but does not find any.

Notice how the various parts of the Stuttering Hexagon are being activated, and the way the Hawthorne Effect is weaving them together to create a situation in which speech blocks are likely to occur. She *believes* that she will stutter and make a fool of herself. She also has many other beliefs that are playing a contributing role—beliefs relating to how she should act, the way she could express herself, what other people want and expect of her, and so forth. Her *perceptions* are that she is dealing with people who will not be sympathetic or understanding. Her *physiological system* is ramping up a full-fledged flight-or-fight reaction. Her *emotions* are rooted in fear and terror. Then it is her turn to order, and that's when her *divided intention* comes into play.

"Yes, ma'am. Can I help you?"

"Yes, I...I...I would like two p...."

Damn. She's stuck on the word "pounds."

"Um...."

Sally closes her eyes as if she's thinking. Her body is pouring tons of adrenaline into her blood stream. Her blood pressure is rising. Her breathing is shallow. Blood is rushing from her stomach into her limbs to give her added strength. Her body is preparing her to fight for her life...just because she wants to say the word "pounds."

The few moments she cannot talk seem like eons. Then her *emotions* subside a bit, and suddenly the word "pounds" escapes her lips.

"Of...."

She has set her tongue to say "salmon," but there is no air escaping from her lungs. Sally is pulled by two opposing forces—the poles of a *divided intention*. She wants to say "salmon"—in fact, the situation demands it. People are waiting, and the clerk behind the counter is anxious to complete the sale. Yet, to let go and speak means that who-knows-what

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may come out of her mouth. Sally later on will tell you that she was afraid she was going to stutter. But perhaps it is more than that. Perhaps it is that her body is in a full fledged fight-or-flight response. Her emotions are rocketing off the scale; yet, Sally is trying to keep her composure. Anyone looking at her would simply see an apparently calm young woman, inappropriately lost in thought.

Inside, it's another story. There is a buildup of panic that she's pushing out of her awareness. To let go and say the word "salmon," means that those feelings would be engaged. What would come out? Fear? Anger? Sadness? Vulnerability? Would she go out of control? Would the word erupt as a shout? Would she sound too aggressive? For Sally, it is a vast unknown, and so she remains caught in the thrall of a speak/don't speak conflict. One thing is certain. It is not yet safe to say the word "salmon."

"Of s....."

When the word "salmon" doesn't come out, Sally cuts off the air flow and resumes her pensive look. The silence is awkward. She has cut off all communication with the world around her. The panic state has enveloped her totally. The silence is deafening.

But feelings cannot remain at that peak for long, and after a few moments the intensity of the fear drops to a safe level.

"...salmon."

Phew. The crisis is over. The counter man finally knows what she wants and goes about slicing off two pounds of salmon and wraps it up in white butcher paper. The sounds of the store once again surround her. She is aware that her face is flushed.

The whole scenario consumed only ten seconds. To Sally, it seemed like a millennium.

Feeling embarrassed but relieved, Sally returns to her apartment and starts preparing the evening meal. Tonight, Karen, another young professional and an old friend, is joining her for dinner. In due course, the salmon is in the oven, and the vegetables are sautéing on the stove. Promptly at seven o'clock, the doorbell rings. It's Karen.

The two women work to finish preparing the meal, and after it's served, Sally opens a bottle of chardonnay. Because they are old friends with lots to tell each other, dinner lasts several hours. The conversation is lively and intimate, and during this time, Sally does not block once. She also never mentions her difficult moment at the meat market.

What you're seeing once again is the same kind of dynamic that unfolded at the Hawthorne plant. There is nothing organically wrong with Sally's speech, but there are significant differences in Sally's emotions, perceptions, beliefs, intentions, physiological responses, and speech-related strategies from one environment to another. It is these differences that make her speech either difficult or easy.

At the market Sally feels she has to perform, and that her self-esteem and self-image are on the line. When she goes to ask for salmon, all these forces

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bring to bear, and she freezes and cannot say the word.

At home with Karen, her acceptance is taken for granted. She doesn't have to do or be anything in order to enjoy the love and affection of a friend. There is enormous trust between the two women. All the elements—the negative emotions, perceptions, beliefs, intentions, and physiological responses—that characterized the encounter in the meat market have been transformed into positive forces. There are no power struggles. There is no need to look good. It's not necessary to perform to earn Karen's high regard. There is only freedom. These positive forces reinforce each other to create a benign hexagon where the need to hold back is no longer an issue. Thus, Sally finds it easy to say the word "salmon" and anything else she wants to express, and her speech blocks do not appear during the entire evening.

You have witnessed the Hawthorne Effect in action.

This scenario with Sally is not meant to represent *all* stuttering situations but simply to show you how the Hawthorne Effect can create an immediate environment that triggers a person to either hold back or let go. It is not any one part of the Stuttering Hexagon that creates the stuttering block; it is all the elements and the way they come together and interact.

## CHANGING THE DEFAULTS

A permanent change in your speech will happen only when you alter the various default settings around the Stuttering Hexagon.

The original defaults are established over time. As children, we practice bad speech habits, and after months or years these behaviors become automatic reflexes and ultimately, are pushed out of our conscious awareness. Similarly, habitual ways of thinking, feeling, and reacting also turn into default responses. Ultimately, these defaults coalesce into a self-supporting system that creates the Stuttering Hexagon.

For the changes to be permanent, you need to initiate a similar process by creating changes in your habitual ways of thinking, feeling, and reacting and practicing them long enough so they become your new defaults. At some point they will coalesce into a more productive self-supporting system. I would like to share some brief observations about doing this.

**Emotions.** You can change how you emotionally respond by putting yourself in situations that appear risky, but that are safe enough so you're still willing to take chances and try out new behaviors. It's important to identify a comfortable starting point. If a Toastmasters club meeting seems too risky, don't start there. Start at a lower risk level, such as an NSA meeting. If that's too risky, find a personal growth group of some sort. Or a speech therapy group. Or an individual therapist. Then, as you become

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comfortable at one level, slowly move up the ladder, one rung at a time, each level consisting of an activity that offers a slightly higher level of risk.

One highly effective program that simultaneously addresses the Stuttering Hexagon on many levels is called Speaking Freely. The program has already been adopted by many chapters of the National Stuttering Association. In a later chapter you will find a detailed discussion of Speaking Freely groups and how to set up and run them.

Remember that nothing will happen unless you're involved with people. Stuttering is a social issue, which is why very few people stutter when they're alone. Unless you keep yourself socially involved, nothing is likely to change. And unless you find an opportunity to provide regular and *frequent* positive experiences that combine both risk and safety, you are not likely to change the default. Once a month experiences will have some effect, but unless they take place more frequently, change is likely to be slow.

**Beliefs.** Challenge and question everything that you believe about yourself, others, and "the way things are." What keeps people stuck is that they find it difficult to "think outside the box." To change your beliefs, you have to read. You have to question. You have to experiment, even though you have no way of knowing beforehand how things will work out.

**Perceptions.** Learn to be an objective observer, and be constantly willing to question your perceptions. "Is that person really laughing at me?" "Do people really want me to be perfect?" "Would asking that person to move his car forward so I can have room to park really be aggressive and presumptuous, or is it entirely within the bounds of propriety?" Keep a journal of what you observe, and after a while, you are likely to see patterns to your behavior. There are also excellent books and programs available on such topics as general semantics and neurolinguistic programming (NLP) that describe the ways people perceive and how they can change their habits of thought and reshape their perceptions.

**Intentions.** Question your intentions. It took me years to realize that my psyche had a built-in "Trojan horse." I would sign myself up for one self-improvement seminar after another, but secretly I'd be dragging my heels and wouldn't incorporate what I was learning into my daily life. Through a series of circumstances, I came to discover that I had a hidden agenda.

As a child I had a large investment in being good. "Good" was synonymous with being loved. I also had a mother who always knew what was right for me. But if she was right, then I couldn't be, so if there was a choice between her way and my way, I would follow her way and secretly hope it wouldn't work out. If her way was wrong, then my way could be right.

Once I became an adult, the "mother" in me would drag the "child" in me to various self-improvement programs. I would be doing what my

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internalized mother wanted me to do, but my internalized child would rebel and drag his heels. Eventually, this game came to light, and I reduced (but not completely eradicated!) that behavior.

**Physiological responses.** Sorry. There's not much you can do here. You're stuck with the physiological system you were born with. However, by exercising some control over your perceptions, beliefs, and intentions, you can reduce the frequency with which you find yourself in fight-or-flight responses.

**Speech behaviors.** Speech clinicians can help a lot, just like a good tennis coach can significantly help your tennis game. If your tennis swing is faulty, even the most confident attitude will only carry your game so far. You have to change your swing in order to attain improved results, and that's where a second pair of eyes can be invaluable.

Similarly, if you're unaware of what you're doing when you stutter, it becomes important to bring those speech producing muscles into awareness so you can keep them loose and relaxed, rather than tight, whenever you find yourself under stress. You can learn to do this on your own, but a competent clinician can facilitate the process.

This is an all-too-brief overview of how to change your defaults. But hopefully, it will give you some initial ideas on where to start and how to proceed.

## *SOME PARTING THOUGHTS*

Back in 1993 I entered into a brief Internet correspondence with a well-known speech pathologist and behaviorist in Australia. In the course of the conversation, I mentioned to him that stuttering had been in my life for about 30 years, but that for last 20-plus years it had been totally gone. I no longer struggled with speech blocks, nor did I find myself dealing with the thoughts, fears, and impulses to block that I had experienced in my earlier days. They had totally disappeared. He did not believe me, and sent the following response:

*Anyone can see that people who have stuttering have muscles that don't work properly. I submit that there is ample scientific reason to believe that stuttering's essence is...a motor aberration. A tiny one measured in milliseconds, but a physiological aberration nonetheless. All you people who stutter out there have subjective feelings about the disorder which to me seem so different. But I bet you all have residing in your motor systems some tiny aberration which causes the speech problem.*

*Why I say stuttering is a physiological problem in essence is because the state of the field of scientific research and scholarship holds that view at present.... The view that stuttering is some other sort of disorder has had*

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*its day. The prevailing view is that it is a genetically transmitted motor speech disorder.*

He was sure that I had simply found a way to control my stuttering and override my genetic heritage. I told him that I was not controlling or overriding anything because there was no longer anything to control. He must have been unconvinced, because he abruptly ended the dialogue and never responded. Apparently, the fact that I had totally disappeared stuttering from my life made no sense to him whatsoever. He was sure that science had identified the seat of the problem, and he was clear that “once a stutterer, always a stutterer.” However, the fact some people *have* been able to make the problem totally go away is a commentary on the true nature of stuttering.

Yet, “once a stutterer, always a stutterer” does hold for a large proportion of people who struggle with the problem. There is usually so much that has to be addressed that at some point, people reach a level of fluency they can live with and then choose to redirect their energies elsewhere. As far as reaching that desired level of fluency, the degree of success one has will have to do with his or her circumstances, experiences, motivation, and personality. Here’s what I’ve deduced are some of the key factors that made the process easier for me:

- My stuttering was very situational, much like Sally’s in the story described earlier. I had difficulty if I had to speak in class or talk to an authority figure or stop a stranger on the street to ask a question, and in those situations, I had all the familiar fears and terrors. On the other hand, I had no difficulty in conversing with my friends or family.
  - Because I was not very assertive, I never tried to push words out when I couldn’t speak, and thus, I never developed secondary struggle behaviors. My stuttering consisted of a simple block, so later on, I had less to unlearn.
  - Since my blocks were not very “interesting,” I was never taunted because of my speech.
  - Since I only had a simple block, and since I never underwent speech therapy where there is often a heavy emphasis on control, I was not imbued with the belief that I had to *control* my speech. Therefore, I never ended up imposing yet another layer of controls atop my already overcontrolled speech.
  - I always knew that I wanted to speak in front of people, so the motivation to work through the problem was constant.
  - I moved to San Francisco in the early 60s where I had many opportunities to participate in the personal growth
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movement that first sunk its roots in the California culture.

- I'm inclined to be counterphobic, meaning that I have a tendency to move toward what frightens me instead of away from it.
- I have an innate curiosity about why people are the way they are, plus I'm a good observer, so I've noticed and thought deeply about virtually everything that's happened to me.
- I'm good at seeing relationships between things that normally are not related.

Everything listed above was of obvious help to me, whereas someone with a severe stuttering problem, a non-supportive environment, less curiosity, and fewer advantages working for them would have had a much tougher time of it. Still, there is much progress that anyone can make if the person is willing to broaden his or her viewpoint. Today, there are more and more programs that approach stuttering from a holistic perspective. Some that come to mind include those run by Eastern Washington University, the American Institute for Stuttering in New York City, and the McGuire Programme in the U.K., Ireland, Norway, and Australia.

The McGuire Programme is particularly interesting. The organization recognizes that changing the personal defaults in a number of areas is important and that it takes time for those changes to happen. Consequently, it offers its graduates a variety of ways to stay actively involved after the initial training. For example, graduates can go through the program as many times as they like at just a token charge. They can also take on the responsibility of becoming coaches. Coaches not only run the trainings, they are also responsible for keeping in touch with graduates by phone and offering continued advice and encouragement. (The best way to learn something is to teach it to others!) This level of participation creates empowerment by involving the coach proactively in many activities which assists not just the student's personal growth but the coach's own growth as well.

## CONCLUSION

We've come a long way since researchers in Hawthorne, Illinois first set out to investigate ways to heighten worker motivation. In this time we've pulled off an impressive number of scientific and medical miracles. We've transplanted hearts, developed artificial joints, pioneered exotic techniques for repairing brains, and grown powerful antibiotics to defeat the most stubborn viruses. Most impressively, we've even decoded the human genome. Yet, after a century of investigation, there are still

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significant proportions of the public and professional community who are running around saying, "Nobody really knows what causes stuttering."

How can that be?

Perhaps our lack of definitive answers is due to the fact that for all these years, when it's come to stuttering, we've been trying to solve the wrong problem.

What the researchers at Western Electric's Hawthorne plant learned is that answers sometimes lie, not in the exotic, but in the ordinary. Sometimes the answer has been lying under our very noses all along, not in a new component, but in understanding a new relationship that ties together elements so common that we never bothered to notice them.

This essay has argued that stuttering is not the product of some exotic genetic glitch but a relationship of common components. In short, a stuttering system. And that it is not just the parts, themselves, but the synergistic relationship between the parts that brings stuttering to life. The system is called the Stuttering Hexagon, and it is composed of your emotions, perceptions, beliefs, intentions, physiological responses, and physical behaviors.

The force that binds these components together is called "The Hawthorne Effect." What results is a living system that operates according to predictable laws and rules; a system that involves not just your speech, but your entire self.

To understand this system and to know how it works is to recognize that stuttering can be changed, reduced, and in some cases, even defeated. Once you understand the parts that make up the system, it becomes easier to map out viable strategies that have a better chance of providing the long-lasting improvements we have all been looking for.

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## WHY ARE SPEECH BLOCKS SO UNPREDICTABLE?

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For years, I used to bite through pencils in frustration, trying to come up with some logical explanation for the seemingly capricious nature of speech blocks.

- Why do I have good days and bad days?
- Why do I sometimes block on words I usually can say without effort?
- Why does the feeling that I'm going to block seem to come out of the blue and for no apparent reason?
- Why can I go along for three minutes without a block, and then suddenly have everything fall apart?

I used to think I'd be better off if I stuttered on every word, rather than only in special situations. At least then, my life would be more predictable. Non-stutterers have no idea of the uncertainties that are created when something as basic as your speech stops and starts and lurches like a car with carburetor problems. It casts an uncertain shadow on every aspect of your life.

I once tried to explain this mindset to a non-stuttering friend. Imagine, I said to him, that you're walking merrily along the street after an uneventful shopping trip to Macy's when all of a sudden this gloved hand comes out of nowhere and — WHUMP! — it bops you on the nose. Not hard. Not so it draws blood. But sudden enough to startle you.

"Hmph!" you say. "Now where did *that* come from?"

A bit ruffled, you continue on down the street. You walk into the bank to make a deposit. Just when you step up to teller window and open your mouth to speak, a gloved hand comes out of nowhere and — WHUMP! — it bops you on the nose. Not hard, but hard enough to disconcert you.

You make your deposit and leave the bank. Walking by a newsstand, you feel a bit rattled and decide to buy a magazine to take your mind off of your anxieties. You fish around for the right change, hand it to the man behind the counter, open your mouth to ask for the magazine...and suddenly this gloved hand comes out of nowhere and — WHUMP! — it bops you on the nose.

How is the world feeling right now?

Unpredictable.

It's lunchtime, so you walk into a local eatery. As you walk through the

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door, you notice you're doing something you didn't do before. You're scanning the room ahead of you, looking for that damned gloved hand. Your schnozz is tired of getting bopped. Except nothing happens. Reassured, you find an empty table, sit down, and open up the menu. Ah, the roast beef sandwich looks great. The waiter comes over to take your order.

"What would you like," he says.

"The roast beef on whole wheat," you answer.

"Anything on the side?"

"Yeah, an order of fries."

"And to drink?"

"A Miller Lite."

"What was that again?"

"A...." You go to repeat Miller Lite, but you never make it, because suddenly a gloved hand comes out of nowhere and — WHUMP! — it bops you on the nose.

*Oh stop it!!!* Why is this happening? None of it makes any sense. Why could you buy a shirt in Macy's without incident, and then walk into the restaurant and get bopped. This constant surprise is driving you crazy.

My friend said he now understood why I found the world so unpredictable.

## *SPEECH BLOCKS HAVE MANY TRIGGERS*

Traditional thinking says that stuttering is all about what we do when we're afraid we're going to stutter. Speech pathologists and most PWS have professed this for almost 80 years. But like many explanations of stuttering, this is only a partial truth. A fear of stuttering can definitely cause more stuttering, and it also explains the self-reinforcing nature of the problem. But it certainly doesn't explain what triggers *all* stuttering blocks. And it does nothing to explain the fact that stuttering can come and go at odd moments and often seems to have a mind of its own.

During my own recovery process, I identified many situations that had nothing to do with stuttering fears per se and yet were fully capable of triggering a speech block.

In this article, we're going to set aside the familiar and obvious reasons why people block, most of which have to do with a fear of stuttering. Instead, we're going to look for the less obvious causes that often play a key role in initiating a stuttering block.

But before we do that, there are several things we need to get clear about. First, I need to explain what I mean when I say "stuttering." I'm not referring to bobulating, which is a coined word that describes the effortless, disfluent speech you hear when someone is uncertain, upset, confused, embarrassed,

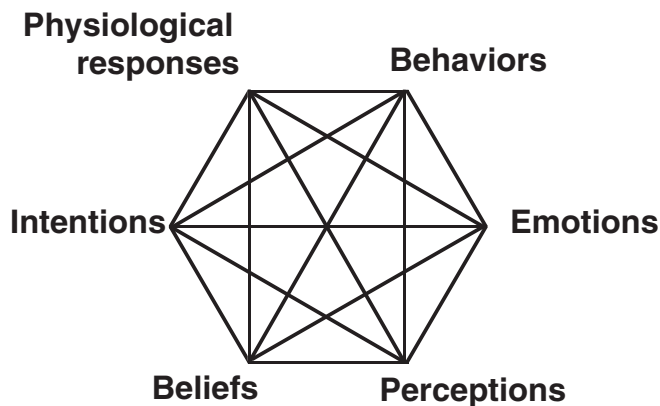
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or discombobulated. I'm talking about speech that is blocked. The individual feels locked up and helpless to continue.

Next I need to define my understanding of what blocking in speech is all about. I have come to understand blocking/stuttering, not simply as a speech problem, but a *system* involving the entire person—an interactive system that's comprised of at least six essential components: behaviors, emotions, perceptions, beliefs, intentions and physiological responses. This system can be visualized as a six-sided figure in which *each point of the hexagon affects and is affected by all the other points*.

## THE STUTTERING HEXAGON



Thus, it's not any one thing that causes a speech block. It's not just one's beliefs...or emotions...or physiological make-up...or speech behaviors that lead the person to lock up and feel helpless and unable to speak. It is the dynamic interaction of *all* these six components that leads to struggled speech.

I also need to share my understanding of the way that emotions contribute to the speech block.

## THE EMOTION TRACK

If you've ever seen a piece of 35mm movie film — the kind they use in a movie theater — you'll notice one or several wiggly lines to the left out of the picture frame that are constantly varying in width, like a line on a drum on a seismograph that measures the intensity of earthquakes. This is the optical sound track that contains the audio for the movie. No matter what is going on, that optical sound track is always there. If there is no sound, the optical track is simply a straight line. But the track is always there.

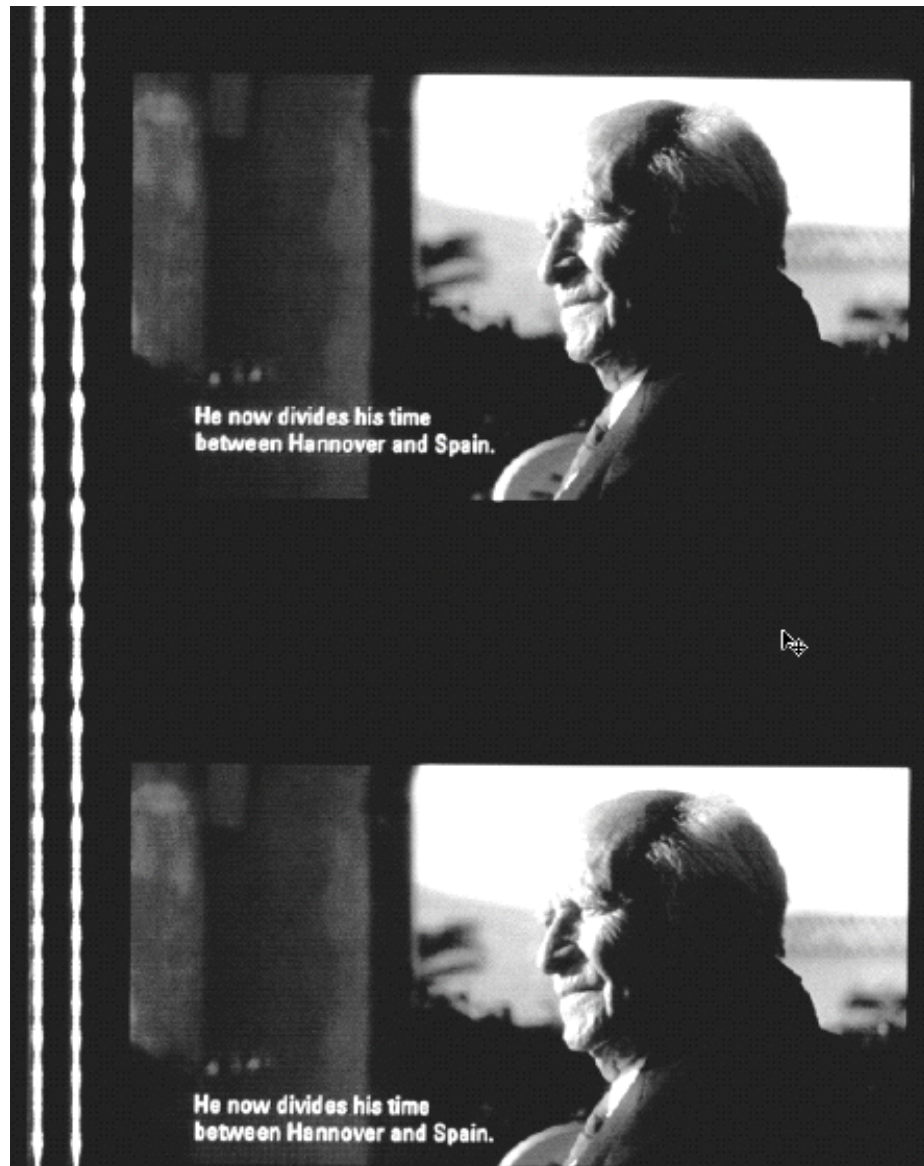
Using this as a metaphor, imagine that every moment you're awake,

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there is a similar “emotion track” running alongside that contains the underlying emotions associated with what is transpiring. Your brain is constantly processing data, experiences, meanings, etc. If you could somehow record the “emotion track,” you’d see it constantly expand and contract, depending on the feelings associated with the particular environ-

Optical  
sound tracks



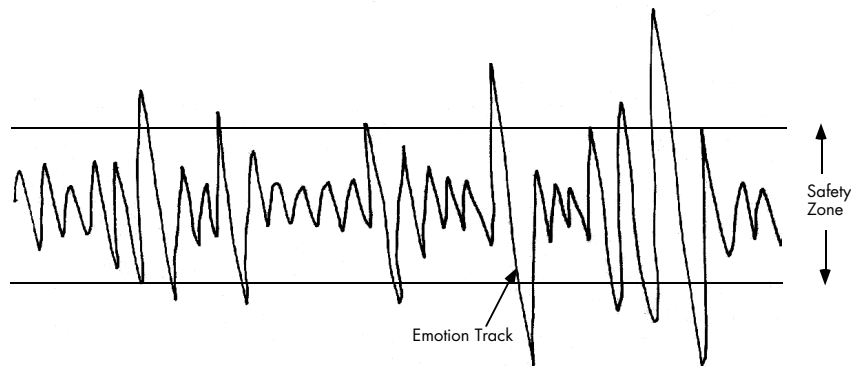
ment, what you were saying, who you were saying it to, what words you were using, what thoughts you were having, and how you were feeling at the time.

Having difficulty with a particular word like “for” may not be about that word in particular. It may have to do with what has come before that word, or what you anticipate might come after and the emotions that this moment are engendering.

If you’re resistant to experiencing those emotions, you’ll be inclined to hold them back (block) until the feelings drop to a manageable level.

How does the emotion track function? Let us say George, a person who stutters, is in a meeting with Mr. Peters, his boss. George suddenly realizes he has another meeting coming up that he’d forgotten about, and he has to interrupt his boss to find out the time as he may have to cut this meeting short. (He also feels a bit incompetent because he absentmindedly left his watch home that day.)

Notice that George has little emotional charge on the words “excuse me.” But when he goes to say the word “Peters,” he has a short block, because his boss’ name has an emotional charge for him. That charge pushes his feelings beyond his comfort zone, prompting him to hold back for a moment until the intensity of those feelings drops. The block is indicated by the spike in the emotion track that indicates that George’s emotions have suddenly shot outside his comfort zone.



**"Excuse me, Mr. P-Peters. C-Can you t-tell me the c-correct t-t-time?"**

Now George has to deal with the hard consonant “c” in “can.” Not only has he had trouble with “c” in the past, but he has a fear that Mr. Peters will not like that he has to interrupt the meeting. This makes it even more difficult to let go. George’s feelings spike again on the “t” in “tell,” but they really spike on the “t” in “time.”

Why is that?

The word “time” not only begins with a feared constant, it also completes the thought. Once he says “time,” Mr. Peters will know that

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George has a time issue and wants to leave the meeting. In anticipation of Mr. Peters' annoyance and how small and unloved that will make him feel, George blocks on the "t" and has to try three times before he can push the word out.

What's amazing is that all this is going on, and George isn't aware of any of it. But then, George isn't aware of a lot of things. He isn't aware of his feelings about authority figures, and how they intimidate him. He isn't aware of his compulsion to please others and to make sure they always like him.

But most significant, George isn't aware that his mind is programmed to *constantly* processes his experience, evaluating each moment to look for what may further his health and survival, and what might threaten it. In fact, neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) claims that we process over two million bits of information via our senses every second and that we delete, distort and generalize this information to "suit" ourselves. As motivational speaker Anthony Robbins says, "Everything you and I do, we do either out of our need to avoid pain or our desire to gain pleasure." This probably sounds too simple, but virtually all life functions this way. It's just that the complexity of the human mind tends to mask this basic drive.

There is never a time when you are without an emotion track. Sometimes, that track is quiescent, such as in moments of deep relaxation. But that track is always there to guide you away from those things that may cause you pain, and toward those things that are likely to give you pleasure.

This is what I have come to observe about the relation between emotions and speech blocks. Now let's look at another key part of the puzzle: the way our experiences are stored.

## *THE HOLISTIC NATURE OF ENGRAMS*

As I better understood the dynamics of the speech block and the strategies I employed to break through or avoid it, the behaviors I used to find so bizarre were no longer strange. But it was not until I stumbled across the concept of the *engram* that I found a credible explanation for the unpredictable nature of those damnable speech blocks.

The engram can be defined as a complete recording, down to the last accurate detail, of every perception present in an experienced moment — a kind of organic hologram that contains all the information derived from the five senses—sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch—as well as whatever thoughts arose at the moment. This cluster of related stimuli is imprinted on the tissue at the cellular level. Permanently fused into the body's circuits, it behaves like a single entity.

Here's an example of an engram. You're in a shopping mall buying a pair

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of jeans when you suddenly hear a scream. You quickly look up and notice that a scruffy guy with long hair and a skull tattooed on the back of his left bicep and wearing a jeans jacket is holding a gun on the poor clerk at the checkout counter, and he's demanding that she give him the contents of the cash register. Instantly, your heart starts racing. The man grabs the cash from the girl and starts walking briskly toward *you*. In a panic, you wonder what to do. Should you run? Should you look away. Should you stand still? The man is now looking at you full in the face, as if daring you to challenge him. You instantly look away and hold your breath. He continues on and in a moment, he's lost in the crowd. You give a big exhale. Behind you, the sales girl is hysterical.

Ten minutes later, you are providing an eyewitness account of the incident to the mall's security police. You recall his estimated height and weight. You describe, as best you can, his tattoo and the kind of jeans jacket he was wearing. Perhaps you even had the presence of mind to notice his shoes and the color of his hair. But there were many other perceptions that you didn't report, partly because they did not seem important and partly because you did not *consciously* notice them. These experiences were woven together into a single engram.

For example, there was a Mariah Carey song playing on the store's audio system. If someone were to ask, you probably couldn't recall this detail, but your subconscious mind recorded the song as part of the engram. When the robber walked past you, your olfactory senses picked up a whiff of motor oil from the spill on his pants. Your subconscious mind saw his rough complexion and the fact that he had a small scar at the very bottom of his chin. That was part of the engram, too. Your eyes recorded the harsh store lighting that radiated from transparent globes. Also part of the engram were the crowd noises from the mall, the emotional overtones of the clerk's screams, the feel of the carpet under your feet, the tension in your legs and body, how thirsty you were. And of course, there were all your emotional reactions—the fear, panic, shallow breathing, tightness in your neck, the cramp in your stomach. All these perceptions and more were recorded and organized into an engram.

Why is all this important? It's important because the engram plays an important role in your body/mind's survival strategy, especially in its relation to a little almond-shaped node within your brain that represents the seat of your emotional memory.

## *THE AMYGDALA*

This node is called the amygdala and is located within the limbic system, the most primitive part of the brain that has elements dating back several

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hundred million years. It's function is reactive—designed to quickly trigger a fight-or-flight reaction whenever the organism (you) feels threatened.

The amygdala has connections, not just to the autonomic nervous system, which controls physiological reflexes such as your heart and breathing rates, but also to other brain regions that process sensory input. It has a special high-speed pathway to the eyes and ears that give it access to raw and unprocessed sensory information. It's like a neural hub with a trip wire that's primed to fire whenever danger arises. In short, the amygdala is designed to bypass the higher, conscious brain that controls cognitive processing so we can act first and think later.

Thus, when we perceive a threat, our body initiates a rapid fire sequence of events, comprising both a fear response and an instant reflex to pull back from whatever we're doing that triggers that fear.

The problem is, the amygdala is not very smart or discerning and doesn't differentiate between physical threats (tigers, robbers, fires) and social threats. When *any* kind of a threat is perceived, the amygdala interprets it as an issue of physical survival. It triggers the sympathetic nervous system, and all at once your breathing becomes shallow, your blood pressure rises, blood rushes to your limbs, heartbeat increases, adrenaline rushes into your blood — a reaction that is designed to give you the physical resources to challenge the threat or run from it.

How does your amygdala know when to trigger a reaction?

It triggers it when there is some element within the moment that *suggests* the situation is threatening.

Thus, a month later you're in a bookstore and suddenly find yourself feeling uneasy. What you're not aware of is that Mariah Carey has just started singing the same tune over the audio system. This one sensory experience recalls the entire jeans shop event. Yet, you're not consciously aware of this. You just know that your heart is beginning to race.

Later that week you're on a bus and you suddenly become uneasy. What you don't realize is that the guy seated next to you works in a garage, and you're picking up the same scent of motor oil that you experienced in the jeans shop.

In the fast-food restaurant the guy behind you has a tattoo on his shoulder. You feel yourself holding back.

Several days later you walk into a clothing store that has the same harsh lighting as the jeans shop, and suddenly you find yourself edgy without knowing why.

A person you're talking to at work asks you a question. His voice has the same timber and quality as the robber's, and as you respond, you find yourself wanting to hold back.

Notice that your circumstances are vastly different from the day you

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witnessed the robbery. You're in a McDonalds, not a jeans shop. The guy with the tattoo is there to eat a hamburger, not rob the store. And yet, your emotions are doing a number on you. The reason has to do with how your reactive mind operates. In short, anything that looks like or feels like *or even vaguely reminds you of* the original experience has the ability to recall and recreate the original experience.

The scruffy guy *is* the holdup. The scent of motor oil *is* the holdup. The Mariah Carey record *is* the holdup. The harsh lighting *is* the holdup. The co-worker's voice *is* the holdup. Each sensory cue functions as if it were a minute piece of a hologram. Shine a strong beam of light on that one little piece of a hologram, and you can see the entire event. Similarly, the most "inconsequential" sensory experiences have the power to recall the entire engram and the emotional responses attached to it.

In the case of speech blocks, a fear of blocking is the most obvious trigger that can cause a person to lock up and be unable to speak. But there are many more ways to trigger this same response. Let's look at some of the non-stuttering-related circumstances that can trigger a stuttering block.

## *REACTING TO A TONE OF VOICE*

One trigger is an individual's tone of voice. Delancey Street Foundation in San Francisco is in the business of rehabilitating drug addicts, prostitutes, convicted felons, and others with acting out character disorders, and they are more successful at it than any other organization in the world. Over a 30-year span, I've periodically donated my services to Delancey as an advertising copywriter and have supported them in other ways.

In 1993, I volunteered to teach a public speaking class at Delancey. One day after the class was concluded, I was on my way to my car when I decided to drop by the Delancey Street restaurant located in the same building to say hi to Abe, the maitre d', whom I had known for 20 years. I didn't see Abe when I walked in, so I asked the acting maitre d' to tell Abe that John Harrison had stopped by and asked for him.

I turned to leave when suddenly the fellow I'd just spoken to abruptly called out, "What'd ya say ya name was?"

I turned back to give him my name again, and suddenly I found myself blocked. More specifically, I was in a panic state, frozen and unable to say a word.

Totally flustered, my head swirling, I was catapulted back 30 years to when I used to regularly block in situations like this. Feeling totally self-conscious, I stopped, took a deep breath, and finally was able to bring myself back to "consciousness" so that I could say "John Harrison."

I left the restaurant upset and puzzled by the sudden appearance of an

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old reaction. Why did it happen? I'd had a wonderful class. I love Delancey Street—both the people and the organization. This was our favorite restaurant in San Francisco. I wasn't thinking about my speech; that had stopped being an issue over two decades ago.

The more I thought about it, the more I felt there was something in the fellow's tone of voice that had triggered my response.

This is precisely how an engram works. It's not necessarily the situation that triggers you, but some *part* of the situation that recalls an older event that was threatening in some way. Perhaps it had been a similar situation in which I'd blocked. Or perhaps there was something about the fellow himself. After all, almost all of the residents in Delancey had been in prison. Almost any of the guys could sound tough. Maybe I was intimidated by his tone of voice. He may have barked the question because he saw me leaving and realized that he hadn't properly heard my name. Maybe that caused him to panic, and maybe I interpreted that panic as something else. A threat? A command? His tone did catch me off guard. Or perhaps there was something about my mindset that day that simply made me more susceptible to his tone of voice. I'll never know. But I do know that for an instant, I was reliving an incident from an earlier time and place.

Single incidents like this only happened every few years. But when they did, they provided a quasi-laboratory setting to study the circumstances leading to a stuttering block.

The big difference between my response that night and how I would have responded 25 years ago is that, once the event was over, it was over. Though I was curious about it, I didn't brood about it. Nor did I see it as a problem with my speech, so it did not reawaken any speech fears. It was just one of those things that occasionally comes out of the blue.

This story is just one example of how a situation *not* involving a stuttering fear per se can suddenly cause a shift in one's "hexagon" and trigger a speech block.

### *RELIVING A FAMILIAR SCENARIO*

Now let's go back even further. By the late 1970's I had been free of speech blocks for more than a decade, although every several years I would be surprised by an isolated incident. Like the Delancey Street encounter, these moments happened so infrequently that they gave me a laboratory-like opportunity to examine under a mental microscope the inner workings of the block.

This particular episode took place at Litronix, a manufacturer of light emitting diodes in Cupertino, California. I was the advertising writer on the account, and I and Bob Schweitzer, the account executive from the adver-

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tising agency, were at the company to present text and layout for a new ad.

Our appointment was for 10 a.m., but since we were a few minutes early, we found ourselves hanging out in the doorway to the office of Litronix president, Bruce Blakken, while he completed a phone call. As I stood chatting with Bob, I suddenly found myself feeling uneasy about introducing myself to Blakken, whom I had not previously met. I had the old familiar feeling that I would block on my name.

That was crazy. I hadn't dealt with speech blocks in a dozen years. I never thought about stuttering in these situations. Why was this feeling making an unexpected reprise? The closer Blakken seemed to be to completing his phone conversation, the more I found myself worrying about my introduction. Eventually Blakken finished his call and motioned us in. Bob shook hands and immediately introduced me, avoiding the need for my having to say my name. Could I have said it without locking up? I would like to think so, but at the moment, I wasn't sure. I only knew that I was off the hook.

Later that evening I sat down at home and mulled over the experience. What was going on at Litronix? Where did those feelings come from, and why did they show up at that particular moment?

I kept turning over the incident in my mind, looking at various parts of the tableau in an effort to find a clue that would explain my reaction. Eventually, something began to jell.

Two decades previously I had worked for my father in New York City. Our ad agency was housed in a small four story building on 50th Street where I worked downstairs. My father's office was on the third floor, and sometimes I would go up to his office when he was on the phone. Unlike visitors from the outside who had to follow a formal protocol (receptionist, waiting room, secretary, and then be ushered in), I'd just hang out in his doorway until he finished his call. After all, I worked there, and besides, I was his son. I could take liberties.

The incident that day at Litronix felt remarkably similar. Because the company was informal, there were no official protocols to follow. We had waited in the reception area before being escorted to Blakken's office, but after the young woman escorted us down the hallway, she simply said, "Oh, he'll be done in a minute, and left us standing in the doorway."

I had been here before. My emotional memory did not acknowledge the differences; rather, it responded to the similarities—head of company, standing in doorway, need for approval, attitudes about authority. These were pieces of a familiar engram that recalled the times when I waited for my dad to get off the phone. Not only did it recall the earlier experience, it *became* the earlier experience. He *was* my dad. I *was* his son, worrying that he wouldn't approve of what I had done. And consequently, all the old

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feelings came back. These, in turn, brought back attitudes and feelings I had as a young man, including those about being judged and having to perform.

My amygdala, charged with protecting me from bodily harm, had made another mistake. Once again, it had inappropriately set off my general arousal syndrome to get me ready to fight or flee the saber-tooth tiger.

### *FEAR OF HAVING YOUR IDEAS REJECTED*

A third type of fear-of-blocking scenario involves speaking to teachers, employers, or anyone whom we cast in a higher position because of what they know, what they do, or what they can do for or to us. I used to think it was always because I might stutter in front of them. Now I know better. Fear of stuttering *can* be a valid fear. But fear of having my ideas rejected, something I took very personally in those days, can be equally intimidating, even if you no longer deal with stuttering.

In the mid-90s I was in a workshop sponsored by the Northern California Chapter of the National Speakers Association. Mariana Nunes, who taught the class, was a wonderful, supportive person and an accomplished professional speaker.

Among the subjects she addressed in the workshop was the need for an effective speech title. I had a talk that I'd given to local community organizations, and at the time, it was entitled, "Is It Fun, or Is It Work?" The talk was about how we tend to separate work and fun and how to build a relationship with work in which work and fun can become synonymous. Mariana felt my title would leave people unclear about the nature of my speech. I liked the title and was resistant to changing it. She said that during the workshop we'd have a chance to try out our speech titles on the other members of the group.

She was half way through the workshop when she asked if anyone had a speech title they'd like to test. At first, I did NOT raise my hand. Other people tried out their speech titles, but I held back. I should also mention that virtually all the people in the workshop were either professional speakers or wannabe speakers, so the caliber of those attending was high. I felt intimidated. Offering my speech title to this group meant that I would be judged by those whose opinion I held in high esteem. I had a fear of having my title rejected. But I didn't want to feel rejected, so I kept holding back.

Eventually, I did raise my hand, but when I did, an old familiar feeling enveloped me. I felt like I was going to block. Now, at that time I hadn't dealt with chronic speech blocks for over 25 years, although every once in a while, a situation would arise that brought up the old feelings. Though I felt as if I would block, I was also aware that it had nothing to do with my speech.

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It had to do with my divided intention. I *sort of* wanted to offer my speech title, but at the same time, I didn't want to make myself vulnerable to the judgments of others. So I really DIDN'T want to speak. This pull in two different directions was creating a familiar sensation that I would lock up and not be able to talk.

I'd like to say that I ignored my feelings and spoke up, but I am embarrassed to admit that I finally put my hand down, and never did share my speech title. I felt bad about it afterward. However, once again, I was aware that the issue wasn't about stuttering. It was about making myself vulnerable.

Fortunately, I had a second chance two months later when Mariana held another workshop. Once again, there was an opportunity to share speech titles. This time, my intention was clear, and mine was the second hand that shot up. When I did share the title, the words just flowed. I even felt surprised that it was so easy. As you can see, my mindset was totally different because my intentions were clear, aligned, and focused.

Had I only focused on my fear of stuttering the first time around, I would never have broadened my purview to include all the other issues that were involved. I would have reinforced the belief that I had a speech problem, and that it was a fear of stuttering that was keeping me back. I would have overlooked the real issues.

By the way, Mariana was right. They didn't like the title. It wasn't communicating. (I survived that revelation.) My presentation is now entitled, "Why Can't Work Be More Fun?" and organizations are much clearer about the nature of the speech.

## *TALKING TO AN UNRESPONSIVE LISTENER*

A fourth situation in which a fear of blocking may have nothing to do with fear of speaking occurs when we speak to a totally unresponsive listener. The person just sits there, stone faced. Brrrrrr. Even now, that's a tough one for me. I'm getting absolutely no clues to how I'm being received.

The need to be heard is one of the most powerful motivating forces in human nature. It has enormous bearing upon our development throughout childhood. Being listened to is the means through which we discover ourselves as understandable and acceptable...or not. It spells the difference between being accepted or isolated.

This also makes *not* being understood one of the most painful human experiences. When we're not appreciated and responded to, our vitality is depleted, and we feel less alive. We are also likely to shut down.

Talking to an unresponsive listener is a lot like looking into a pitch black room. We project our own bogeymen into the darkness. In the absence of

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a response, our insecurities are awakened, and questions start undermining our self-esteem. Are we making sense? Are we well-regarded? Or are we being seen as the total fool, acting stupid and prattling on and on.

These questions wouldn't be so important if we didn't give the listener such power over us—the power to validate us, to tell us we're okay.

Why don't we just validate ourselves? Why do we need *them*? Because we create our own feelings of low self-esteem, and then turn to the other person to make us feel okay.

They have power over us because we want something from them—approval, love, acceptance. Sometimes, they're in a position to dole it out because of their position. But often, it's simply that we make them important and then look to them to validate us.

Our fear, of course, is that they'll do just the opposite. They won't like us or want us. So we desperately try to become presentable. We hold back our unworthy self. We second guess what they want, so we can provide it, or be it. We hide our dysfluent speech...our assertiveness...our spontaneity...our *real* self. Careful! Something may come up that the other person will find offensive. Because of their sphinx-like, expressionless manner, we tread lightly around them, as carefully as if we were walking on broken glass. We do everything we can to make ourselves liked. And when they don't react, we hold back even more.

Our ultimate fear? It's that they will abandon us. I call it the ultimate fear, because in our childlike state, if we're helpless *and* abandoned, it means that we may die.

No wonder I grew up obsessed with always having to know whether I was coming across and whether people were receptive to what I had to say. I constantly looked for nonverbal clues to tell me whether or not I was connecting—a smile, a look of interest, an attentiveness.

But some people are just not expressive. It's not that they don't like you or don't appreciate what you're saying. It's just not in their nature to be responsive.

I'd like to tell you I've outgrown all this, but the fact is that unresponsive people still make me uncomfortable. It has nothing to do with a fear of stuttering. It has to do with a fear of not being validated, and 30 years ago in these situations, I would be highly likely to block.

## *THE ALARM CLOCK EFFECT*

A participant on the Internet's neuro-semantics discussion group raised an interesting question. He asked, "If a person blocks to hold back and

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to avoid experiencing an emotion, etc., how does that relate to neutral, meaningless words such as ‘the’ and ‘and,’ as opposed to words with real content.”

One explanation for why we sometimes block on “meaningless” words is something I call “The Alarm Clock Effect.” This has nothing to do with a fear of stuttering per se, but about feeling that we’ve been speaking too long. We’ve been acting too assertively, and now it’s time for us to pull back.

When I first came to San Francisco years ago and joined the Junior Advertising Club, I periodically had to get up and speak in front of the group. On these occasions, I noticed an interesting phenomenon. In the beginning, I could speak for about 10 seconds before my “alarm clock” went off, and my anxiety level climbed to an uncomfortable level that would cause me to block. This had to do with my level of comfort in the situation and how long I could tolerate being in the power position (i.e.: in front of the group) before my feelings zoomed outside my comfort zone. Thus, I might block on the word “for,” not because that word was threatening, but simply because I had been letting go in front of the group for too long, and now I felt compelled to rein myself in. (A related fear is when someone speaks “too long” in a performance situation without blocking and the self-imposed pressure to keep up this perfect performance becomes overwhelming.)

However, the more opportunities I had to be up in front of the group, the more ordinary it began to feel, the more comfortable I became in the situation, and the longer I’d be able to speak—30 seconds, 45 seconds, one minute—before my alarm clock “rang.” This was an indication of my gradually expanding comfort zone as well as my growing willingness to assert myself.

As your self-esteem grows, as you build confidence in your ability to express yourself and become increasingly comfortable with projecting your power, you’ll find yourself able to speak for longer and longer periods without constantly hitting the brake. Speaking will cease to be an activity that wears you down; rather, speaking will energize you as you release more and more energy, because you are no longer working against yourself. Your “alarm clock” will allow you to go for longer periods without “ringing,” and eventually, may stop ringing altogether.

In analyzing a speaking situation, get in the habit of noticing what your emotions are doing and whether, just before you blocked, your feelings moved outside your comfort zone, causing you to pull back. Then ask yourself what the threat was. You can speed up the learning process by keeping a diary or writing down the incidents you remember on file cards. If you do this over time, you’ll begin to see definite trends and patterns. And those, in turn, will identify problem areas that need to be addressed.

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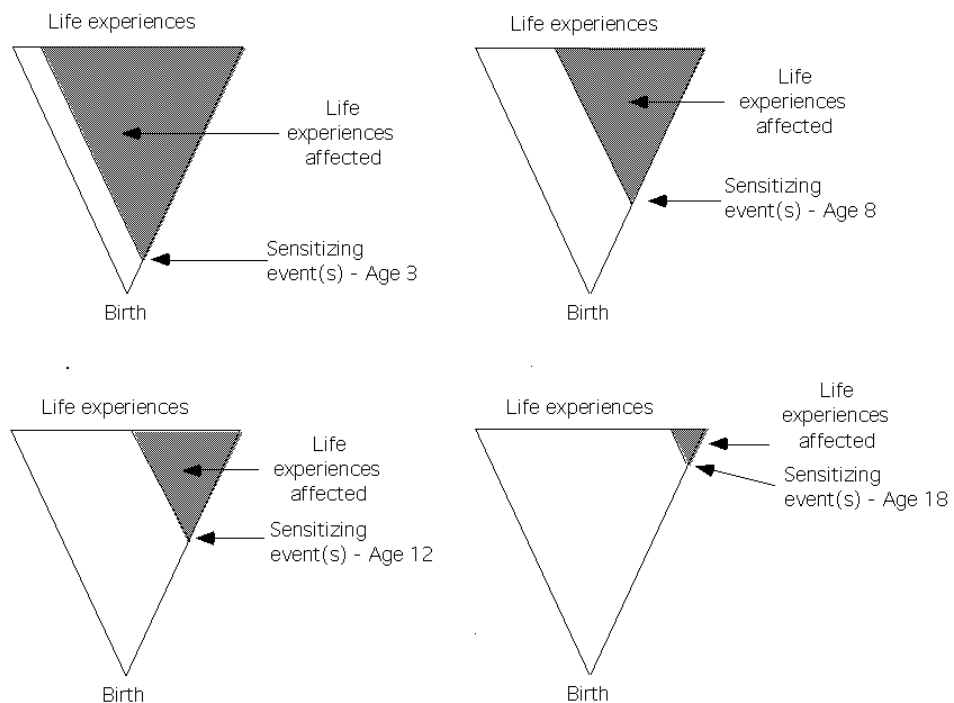
## *HOW ABOUT PEOPLE WHO SEEM TO BLOCK IN ALL SITUATIONS?*

After more than a quarter century with the National Stuttering Association, I've seen every kind of stuttering you can imagine. I've met people who only block occasionally, and I've met those who struggle with every word.

What accounts for the people who seem to stutter all the time?

To help explain this, I devised something I call, "The Principle of the Upside Down Triangle." This metaphor refers to the time in the child's life at which particular sensitizing events take place. The earlier they occur, the broader the impact they will have on the person's life later on.

Let's say an 18-year old speaks up in class and is severely criticized and humiliated by a male teacher. There is the likelihood that the student will develop a fear of that teacher, or similar male teachers, and be discouraged from contributing further in that class.



If the event takes place at age 12, the student may not be as discerning and may project that fear onto all teachers.

If it happens at age eight, he may end up being afraid of all adults.

If it happens at age three, his fear may become generalized, not only to adults, but to *any* situation in which he's called upon to be assertive.

At age three, he is not so much relating to the shoulds and should-nots

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of specific situations as he is to whether certain emotions are safe to express *at any time*.

For example, assertive feelings are an integral part of sex, creativity, and the expression of anger, hate, tenderness, and love. They're part of one's ego. If early in the child's formative years he is put down for expressing his wants or needs in any of these activities, his fear of expressing strong feelings can easily become generalized.

He may come to the conclusion that his true self should never be revealed under *any* circumstances. Self-assertion *per se* may become a no-no. Then, almost all speaking situations will be threatening, and he'll find it difficult to speak anytime, anywhere, without blocking.

Similarly, if not being listened to commences during early childhood, this would also have a broader impact on the individual's life.

Compare this to the individual who's sensitizing experiences occurred later, and whose fears are generally limited to specific situations.

As you can see in the above diagrams, the earlier the sensitizing events take place, the broader the impact they will have on an individual's life, and the more widespread will be the incidence of speech blocks.

## *IMPRINTING THE BRAIN*

Changes are also more difficult to implement when the unwanted behaviors are acquired early in life. An article in *Time* magazine in February 1997 explains why. The article starts out by describing how neural circuits are established:

1. An embryo's brain produces many more neurons, or nerve cells, than it needs, then eliminates the excess.
2. The surviving neurons spin out axons, the long-distance transmission lines of the nervous system. At their ends, the axons spin out multiple branches that temporarily connect with many targets.
3. Spontaneous bursts of electrical activity strengthen some of these connections, while others (the connections that are not reinforced by activity) atrophy.
4. After birth, the brain experiences a second growth spurt, as the axons (which send signals) and dendrites (which receive them) explode with new connections. Electrical activity, triggered by a flood of sensory experiences, fine-tunes the brain's circuitry—*determining which connections will be retained and which will be pruned*. [my emphasis]

The article observes that "by the age of three, a child who is neglected or abused bears marks that, if not indelible, are exceedingly difficult to erase."

That would also be true of children who are subjected to anxieties about

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self-expression and who develop strategies and patterned behaviors designed to help them cope.

Then, from later in the article: "What wires a child's brain, say neuroscientists...is repeated experience. Each time a baby tries to touch a tantalizing object or gazes intently at a face or listens to a lullaby, tiny bursts of electricity shoot through the brain, knitting neurons into circuits as well defined as those etched onto silicon chips."

This process continues until about the age of 10 "when the balance between synapse creation and atrophy abruptly shifts. Over the next several years, the brain will ruthlessly destroy its weakest synapses, preserving only those that have been magically transformed by experience."

No wonder some people have such overpowering difficulties with speech. Through repetition, their early fears of self-expression, with all the attendant perceptions, beliefs, and response strategies, have become deeply etched in mind and body and incorporated as part of the individual's personality. In a similar manner, the blocking strategies they adopt also become habituated.

### *CAN EARLY PROGRAMMING BE DEFEATED?*

The good news is that you can reformat these early experiences by reframing them so that the old reactions are not called up. You can also provide yourself with a choice of responses by developing new behavior patterns and repeating them over and over again until you automatically default to them. You will have to work much harder at creating those new response patterns, because your mind is no longer a blank slate and a certain amount of unlearning is now required. You will also have to address much more than your speech. You'll have to address the perceptions, beliefs, emotional responses, and conflicting intentions that help to create the reactive patterns leading to a block.

Can it be done?

Yes, says author Daniel Goleman. In his book, *Emotional Intelligence*, Goleman talks about a problem that, like chronic stuttering, usually starts in one's early years: obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). He reports that those being treated for OCD, which is another hard-to-break and deep-seated disorder, have been able to change their feelings and responses. They do it by confronting their fears, examining their beliefs and generating repeated experiences of a positive nature.

For example, one of the more common compulsions of the OCD sufferer is repeated hand washing. People are known to wash their hands hundreds and hundreds of times a day, driven by a fear that if they failed to do this, they would attract a disease and die. During therapy, patients in this study

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were systemically placed at a sink but not allowed to wash. At the same time, they were encouraged to question their fears and challenge their deep-seated beliefs. Gradually, after months of similar sessions, the compulsions faded.

Repeated positive experiences did not eradicate the old memories. They still existed. But it gave the individuals different ways of interpreting them and alternative ways to respond. They weren't stuck playing out "the same old tune." True, it took more effort to counteract the old responses whose roots reached back to early childhood. But motivated individuals were able to disrupt the old reaction patterns and relieve their symptoms, as effectively as if they had been treated with heavy-duty drugs like Prozac.

Says Goleman, "The brain remains plastic throughout life, though not to the spectacular extent seen in childhood. All learning implies a change in the brain, a strengthening of synaptic connection. The brain changes in the patients with obsessive-compulsive disorder show that emotional habits are malleable throughout life, with some sustained effort, even at the neural level. What happens with the brain...is an analog of the effects all repeated or intense emotional experiences bring, for better or for worse."

The same principle applies to chronic speech blocks.

By venturing outside your comfort zone, being willing to experience your way through the negative emotions, and by reframing the old learnings using NLP, neuro-semantics, and other tools from cognitive psychology—you can build alternative responses, even though the old memories will always exist in your emotional archives. The adage, "What doesn't kill you will make you stronger" really applies.

But to effect these changes, you have to put yourself at risk (at least, in your own mind) by such things as disclosing to people that you stutter, deliberately looking for speaking opportunities, and finding *regular* opportunities to speak, especially in those situations that feel risky but are actually safe such as Toastmasters.

Such repeated risk-taking activities affect, not just your speech, but your total self. They reprogram your emotional memory. They help you create a broader, more honest and grounded sense of who you are by building positive beliefs, perceptions, and emotions. In effect, you're changing, not just your blocking behaviors, but the whole ground of being that supports those behaviors. By giving your Stuttering Hexagon a more positive spin, you are assuring that the old ways of holding back and blocking will no longer be appropriate for the newer, expanded, more resourceful you.

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## *KEEP LOOKING AT THE BIG PICTURE*

I have to confess I'm really frustrated when, year in and year out, people maintain their tunnel vision about stuttering. For years and years, people were mystified by their speech blocks. Nobody knew what they were about. Then along came the speech clinicians and researchers who offered a simple and logical explanation: "Stuttering is what you do to keep yourself from stuttering."

The world hungrily claimed this as The Explanation. "Hurray!" said everyone. "We now have an answer that makes sense."

That's when the blinders went on. People stopped looking. We assumed that this explanation was the *entire* answer. We limited our perspective. We stopped questioning whether there were other parts of the problem that had to be factored in.

Fortunately, not everyone has fallen into that trap. I've met many individuals who have substantially, or fully, recovered from stuttering, and all of them looked beyond the obvious. They developed a keen awareness of themselves as people. They made an effort to notice how they thought and felt, and they correlated those actions and experiences with their ability to speak. Ultimately, they came to understand that underlying their speech blocks was a need to hold back, and that the reasons for holding back were linked to many facets of their life, not just to a fear of stuttering. The self-knowledge they developed became an integral part of their recovery.

If you're one of those individuals for whom constant practice of speech controls is not working...or if the effort to remain fluent has become too difficult...perhaps it's not because you haven't been practicing hard enough. Maybe it's because you haven't established a Fluency Hexagon to support the fluency goals you're working toward. Your hexagon is still organized around holding back, rather than letting go.

If that's the case, it's time to broaden your field of vision. It's time to look beyond your fear of stuttering and start discovering the ways your speech blocks are intimately connected to all the various aspects of who you are.

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## LOSING YOUR WILL TO SPEAK

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A couple of years ago my wife and I went to the San Mateo County Fair south of San Francisco. I've always liked county fairs because I get to see things a city slicker doesn't bump into very often like cows, 4-H exhibits and working sheep dogs.

Plus there are always a few surprises.

We were just about to leave the fair when announcer on the loudspeaker over by the main stage announced that noted hypnotist George Somethingorother was going to start his show in just five minutes. Ever since I was a kid, I've been fascinated with hypnotists. Doris, too. So we plunked our butts down on a bench and waited for the show to begin.

The hypnotist was pretty good. He had klutzy teenagers doing slick Tony Orlando imitations and hulking linebacker types hopping around the stage like Peter Rabbit. But what I remember best is a big, strapping motorcyclist, the kind who could play volleyball with my refrigerator. The hypnotist told him that when he woke him up, he'll be stuck to his seat. Sure enough, the fellow was awakened, and a few moments afterward, the hypnotist asked everyone on the stage to stand up and stretch. They all did except this one poor guy. Although he tried and tried, he just couldn't lift his butt from the chair. The audience was hysterical.

I suddenly had a flash. Maybe that's what happens when we have a speech block. We're hypnotised.

"C'mon," I can hear you saying. "I stutter and nobody has ever put me in a trance."

Not so fast. Let's look at how we go about hypnotizing someone. It calls for getting the subject's complete confidence and trust. We get him to focus totally on what we're saying, and at some point his concentration is so focused that he loses his sense of self. Our voice is his only reality. At this moment he WANTS to believe whatever we tell him, even if it contradicts his own experience.

Any of this sound familiar? It should. It's similar to how children are "hypnotized" by adults. Like the hypnotic subject, the child is extremely impressionable. He perceives the adult as an authority figure, someone who knows The Truth. He wants to trust and please. And he wants the adult to take care of him. Consequently, he is inclined to believe as truth what the adult tells him...whether it's true or not.

Voila! Hypnosis without the trance.

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These posthypnotic suggestions from childhood are carried into adult life and control the way we feel and act. Obviously, a great deal of what our parents tell us is necessary if we are to become socialized and well-adjusted. But sometimes a well-meaning parent or other authority figure gives us suggestions that are not in our best interests; for example, good children “should be seen and not heard,” “good children shouldn’t cry or get angry or want what they want,” etc. These suggestions separate us from what we truly think and feel and if left unchallenged, serve as guidelines for our entire lives.

### *LOSING THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING IN CONTROL*

But why don’t we know we’re hypnotized? Easy. *We forget where our beliefs come from.*

Over time, we have come to believe that the compulsion to be nice, to hold in our feelings, to speak perfectly, to always satisfy other people’s needs at the expense of our own are all things *we* really want. We forget that we’re following someone else’s commands. So when we go to express our true desires...like asking someone in a nonsmoking area to put out his cigarette...we block and we don’t know why.

See how similar in concept this is to the motorcyclist in the hypnosis demonstration? You tell him he won’t be able to unstick himself from his chair. You also tell him to forget all knowledge of what has just transpired. Then you wake him up and ask him to stand up and stretch. Try as he will he can’t get up.

On one hand he does want to stand up. That’s his own will asserting itself. Yet, on a deeper level, he really doesn’t want to stand up. He wants to follow your directions to the letter. He wants to please you. Your will is more important than his. The only reason his inability to rise seems like voodoo to him is that you’ve previously told him to forget all knowledge of the suggestions you’ve given him. He doesn’t know that *he’s* the one who’s choosing to stay seated.

Let’s look at this in terms of speech blocks. Have you ever noticed that whenever you block, you seem to be pulled in two directions — to talk and not to talk? That’s not very far removed from wanting to stand and sit at the same time. You want to do two opposing things, and it leaves you frozen and unable to move.

But that’s silly. Why wouldn’t you want to talk?

When your lips are locked and you can’t say “butter” to the lady in the cafeteria, it could be that you’re acting off an internalized, unspoken directive that says you shouldn’t be assertive. Or as a child you may have picked up the belief that every word that came out of your mouth had to

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be perfect. It could be any number of different reasons.

Your inability to speak could also relate to the *feelings* associated with the words you want to say. If the serving lady looks like your hated sixth grade teacher, and you're operating off a suggestion that it's not "right" to express (or even feel!) anger or some other strong emotion, you're caught in that same do/don't-do situation. You want to talk at the same time that you're afraid of revealing what's really going on. It doesn't feel safe. Consequently, one inner voice says, "Oops, we better close up shop until it feels less dangerous." while the opposing voice cries out, "But...but I gotta say this RIGHT NOW!"

You're in a similar situation to the biker who can't get out of his seat. You want to do something, yet at the same time you're acting off of a belief (implanted years ago) that says you shouldn't...a prohibition that you've totally forgotten about. This theory of conflicting intentions explains why 99% of us can talk just fine when we're alone and not likely to be confronted with opposing demands.

The actual "hypnotic suggestion" is hard to pinpoint. The only point I want to make is that when you're trying to speak and not speak at the same time, it's as if you've been hypnotized.

## *WE'RE CONSTANTLY BEING "HYPNOTIZED"*

Most of us don't recognize the degree to which we are constantly being "hypnotized" by suggestions from the media, our business associates, our friends and loved ones. Here's a typical example.

You're out shopping with a close friend whose opinion you trust. In the sportswear department of Macy's your friend finds a shirt she says would look just great on you. At first, you don't like it. Not your colors. But the more she talks, the more you begin to come around, until you suddenly decide you like it and buy the shirt. You've been hypnotised. You're foregoing your own experience and seeing something you don't really see.

We've looked at how other people's suggestions can effect our *perceptions*. Let me demonstrate the way in which suggestions can affect us *physically*. Let's say you're on a connecting flight from Pittsburgh to Williamsport, Pennsylvania, and 30 minutes into the trip you need to pee in the worst way. It's a dire emergency, because, like many small commuter aircraft, there is no bathroom on board. (I've been on those flights; I know.) Your seat mate (of the same sex) jokingly suggests that in an emergency you could use the air sickness bag to pee in. (I'm assuming you're a guy.)

Would you do it if you had to?

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If you're like the rest of us, you'd rather die first. Our parents, those early childhood hypnotists, gave us repeated prohibitions about peeing anywhere other than in the toilet or behind a bush. Those proscriptions are so strong that they allow us to perform amazing feats of self-control, which is why you're able to hang on.

At last, the plane lands. As you race through the terminal toward the toilets, you notice something curious. The need to pee and the fear that you won't make it increases in direct proportion to how close you are to the toilets. The closer you get, the more you feel like you're losing control. As you frantically unzip your jeans, the last three seconds are sheer hell. But you make it...just.

Just?

You were on the flight for almost an hour. Could it be that you actually timed it down to the last critical second? Highly unlikely. You're simply experiencing how your unconscious programming causes you to lock and unlock your sphincter.

Your resolve not to pee weakened the closer you got to the toilet, because you knew that in a moment it would be socially acceptable to let go. This is why you unconsciously started to relax control of your sphincter and why it suddenly felt that you couldn't wait a second longer. *It only seemed like you had split second timing because the whole locking/unlocking process took place outside your conscious awareness.*

From my observation, this is similar to what happens with a speech block. We unconsciously lock our tongue, lips, vocal folds and diaphragm when expressing ourselves seems too threatening, and we don't allow those muscles to release until the intensity of our feelings subsides, and it feels safe to talk again. No matter how hard we try to force out the words, our will to hold back is stronger.

As you can see, then, other people's suggestions can exert powerful controls over our thoughts, feelings and behavior. Let's sum up our observations about hypnosis and stuttering.

- Someone can hypnotize you without putting you in a trance. You are hypnotized when someone else's reality becomes more "real" than your own.
  - When a hypnotic suggestion comes in conflict with something you want to do, you will become blocked. Being blocked is a conflict of will—yours and someone else's.
  - A posthypnotic suggestion is nothing more than taking on the other person's will and making it more powerful than your own. Be perfectly clear that this does not *happen* to you. You *choose* to believe the other person and give him or her this power.
  - A speech block may represent the same kind of conflict as that
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experienced by the motorcyclist who couldn't get out of his seat. In this case there is an unconscious command not to do something.

- What we call chronic stuttering (or speech blocks) may really be struggle behavior in which we try to push out a word which, at that moment, we are resolved not to say.

- There are any number of reasons why we might not want to say that word. The reasons can relate to particular emotions associated with that word, emotions that we're afraid to show, or we might be afraid to speak up because of how we might appear to others.

- We usually don't know when we're hypnotized. Therefore, we're likely to do things, or be blocked from doing them, and not understand why. Because we've forgotten that we've made all the original choices, the block appears to be outside of our control, and we feel helpless.

- We cannot be hypnotized without first having a *need* to believe. There can be many reasons for this need, such as wanting another person's approval or love, being afraid to act forcefully in the presence of an authority figure, believing that the other person's reality is more "real" than our own, etc.

- Hypnosis involves a loss of will, and in the case of speech blocks, it can involve losing our will to speak.

If all of the above is true, then how can we un-hypnotize ourselves?

Doing it takes hard work. The concept is simple, but doing it requires time, effort and commitment. It calls for reversing the state of hypnosis. If being hypnotized is a loss of will, then becoming "awake" requires you to discover what is truly going on and reclaim your will.

You need to begin getting in touch with what is *true* for you, rather than what you imagine others want you to believe or feel. Notice your actions, opinions, feelings. Through extended observation, you may discover that your speech blocks reflect a conflict between two powerful opposing forces:

Your desire to accommodate the will of others.

And your desire to speak your mind and express your true feelings.

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## THIRTEEN OBSERVATIONS ABOUT PEOPLE WHO STUTTER

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Over many years of self-observation and rubbing shoulders with members of the National Stuttering Association, I've noticed some recurring characteristics among people who stutter. Of course, not all of the following applies to all people within the stuttering community, but I have seen these commonalities more often than not. (This list originally ran in the January 1982 edition of *Letting GO*.)

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1. We have difficulty in letting go, not just in our speech, but across the board...in what we feel and in what we're willing to risk.
  2. We are not grounded. We don't have a strong sense of who we are, because we are overly concerned with other people's opinion of us.
  3. Because we are obsessively focused on pleasing others, we constantly worry about what people think of our behavior...our thoughts...our wishes...our beliefs...in fact, everything concerning our personal identity and self-worth.
  4. We have a narrow self-image. It does not encompass all of who we are. And we constantly try to squeeze ourselves into this narrow self-image. Not only is this self-image extremely confining, it is also very rigid.
  5. We lack self-assertiveness. We see every self-assertive act as an aggressive act, and this helps to create a stressful world. We see ourselves as without rights. So when we do feel ourselves on top of the world, we always see ourselves there at someone else's expense (because on our mountain top, there's always only room for one.)
  6. We have a great deal of misinformation about what constitutes acceptable speaking behavior. It's okay for someone else to speak forcefully and dynamically, but when we speak with aliveness in our voice, we see ourselves as coming off too strong, too overpowering, and too visible.
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7. Hand-in-hand with our fear of looking too powerful, we see ourselves as powerless. As victims. As helpless.
  8. We see life as a performance. This is related to our need to please others.
  9. Because we see life as a performance, we are afraid to make mistakes because of how we might be judged.
  10. Because we're afraid to make mistakes, we're afraid of responsibility and making decisions.
  11. Because we've run from ourselves, we have little self-knowledge. Consequently, we tend to obsess on what is visible — our imperfect speech. And we tend to blame all our problems on it.
  12. Because of everything previously mentioned, we see ourselves as basically different from other human beings.
  13. Thus, it is not surprising that we've had few, if any, positive speaking experiences.
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PART

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THE STUTTERING MINDSET

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## P A R T 2

Yes, there is such a thing as a “stuttering mindset,” and it’s created by the interaction of your emotions, perceptions, beliefs and expectations. This interaction is so subtle that it typically operates outside your awareness. It doesn’t shout; it whispers. And the messages are often so subtle that they pass beneath your radar. Yet these whisperings exert a powerful influence on how you think and the way you experience the speaking situation.

People who stutter are typically full of questions. Some of the more frequent inquiries that come my way include “Why is it easier to talk when I’m alone?” or “Why is it easier when I speak with an accent or in one way or another, take on the personality of another person?”

What’s interesting is how puzzling questions like these are no longer formidable when you look at chronic stuttering and blocking as a *system*. As you understand the way the points of the Stuttering Hexagon interact, the answers become surprisingly accessible.

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## WHY TALKING IS EASIER WHILE YOU'RE "BEING" SOMEONE ELSE

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Do you find it easier to talk if you take on someone else's personality? Why is it that many people who stutter have absolutely no difficulty with their speech when they're acting on stage? Maybe this story will help to shed light on this Chinese puzzle.

All through school I lived in perpetual fear of speaking in front of an audience, so it was with quaking knees that I awaited the approach of the senior play, a traditional production for the graduating class.

In my skit I was cast as our French teacher, Monsieur Quinche. I had to recite a poem having to do with my prowess as a teacher and my universal appeal to women. (This was something of a joke, as Monsieur was a rather rotund, outmoded fixture who spent years parked behind his desk, dictating irregular verbs that nobody ever remembered.)

As opening night approached, I suffered the expected queasy stomach. I couldn't shake the fear of becoming totally blocked in front of hundreds of parents, teachers and classmates. I wondered how I could ever survive the disgrace.

Well, surprise. Armageddon didn't take place. I stood up in front of the audience, opened my mouth, and in heavily accented English, out came the lyrics. I still remember the opening lines:

*I'm ze teachaire of ze houaire,  
I'm ze teachaire of ze year.  
My language is known from 'ere to 'ere to 'ere.  
It's ze language of savoir faire.  
Who am I? I'm Woodmere's Pierre."*

I was dramatic. I was flamboyant. And I was *totally fluent*.

So what was going on? How did I carry it off? Why was I able to talk fluently when I assumed another personality?

### *SELF IMAGE VS. TOTAL SELF*

As we grow up, we learn to see ourselves in a particular way. My self-

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image back in school was of a nice, unassertive person. I always blended in with the crowd. Strong feelings had no place in my life. It made me uneasy to stand out.

Let's represent the concept of Self-Image with a circle.

There was also another me, a more complete me which we'll call my Total Self, because it represented the totality of who I really was: my thoughts, abilities, feelings, experiences, beliefs, my physical self...everything known and unknown about me. The works. We'll represent the concept of Total Self with a second circle.

Now, let me pose a question. If there is a major overlap between those two circles – that is, if how I see myself is how I really am – what kind of a person would I be?

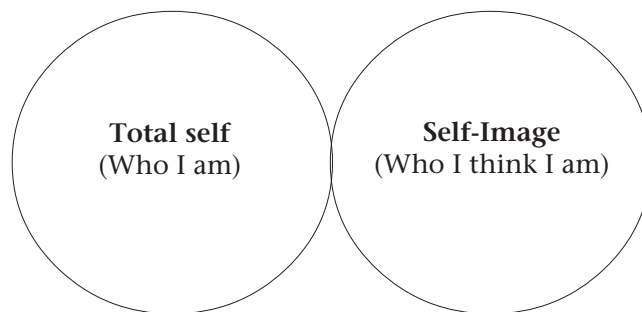


**The Well-Adjusted Person**

You're right. I'd be self-accepting. I'd be a well-grounded person because I'd be in touch with my personal resources. I'd see and accept the different sides of myself – my strengths, weaknesses, arrogance, humor, sadness, caring, jealousies, generosity, pettiness and so on.

Obviously, not all parts of myself would be included within my self-image. All of us have capabilities or hidden sides we'll never get in touch with, at least, not in this lifetime. Furthermore, a certain amount of self-delusion is a part of human nature. But by and large, if most of what we see is an accurate portrayal, we're in good shape.

Now look at the next set of circles.



**This Person Is Totally Out of Touch**

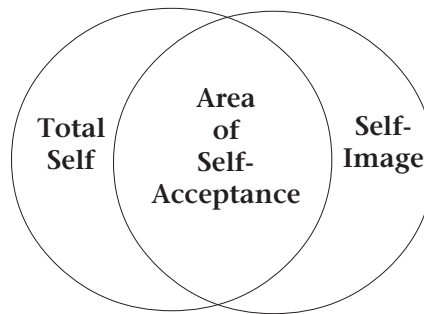
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What kind of person are we describing here?

A certified psychotic.

This person has rejected everything about himself. He does have a self-image, of course, but it's comprised of beliefs that have no basis in reality. The guy in the psychotic ward who thinks he's Napoleon or Jesus Christ would be a good example.

The average person falls somewhere in between these two extremes and can be represented by the following set of interlocking circles.



**The Average Person**

As you can see, there's a large area of congruency where the person is really in touch with who he (or she) is. Plus there are smaller areas where the individual is not aware of his true self as well as areas where he sees qualities and characteristics that aren't actually there.

For example, notice the part of the "Self-Image" circle to the right of the overlap area. This is where a particular false image of ourselves would reside — for example, a perception of ourselves as helpless when we're anything but. Now look at the part of the "Total Self" circle to the left of the overlap — this corresponds to the side of us that's quick to say, "Oh, I could never see myself doing that!" even though *that* may be something as innocuous as dancing the Charleston, asking someone for a date, or getting change from a busy clerk at the corner newsstand. To do any of these things would cause us to feel as if we were acting out of character.

The area to the left is precisely where I hid my image as a public speaker. I simply couldn't see myself as someone who could cut loose and have fun (although as an adult I have discovered that I very much enjoy speaking in front of people.)

So every time my excitement would rise during a speaking situation, I'd block it out...by locking my lips, tongue, vocal cords or chest until the forbidden feelings passed. This way, I avoided experiencing — that is, "owning" — my various other sides, and saw only the tight, constricted, blocked personality that I had come to accept as the real *me*.

How, then was I able to come off so strongly in the senior play?

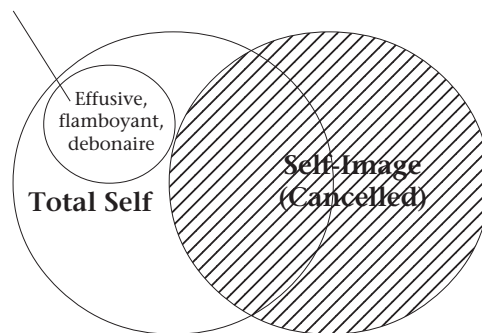
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## TAKING ON THE FRENCHMAN'S PERSONALITY

I had seen enough Maurice Chevalier movies to have a vivid picture of how the stereotypical Frenchman was supposed to act – effusive, flamboyant, debonaire; a person who is not afraid to display what he feels, not only in words but with his whole body. (How totally unlike my own self-image he was.)

Consequently, when I assumed the role of a Frenchman, there was no need to hold back; there was nothing to block. I could let go and have fun, *because I knew people would accept my spontaneity and energy as long as I played that role. My behavior was appropriate for the image.* If we were to diagram what was happening, it would look like the schematic below.

**The Frenchman**  
(borrowed self-image)



If you had asked me during Senior Night whether that was me, I would have told you – "Oh no! I'm not like that."

Well, was it me, or wasn't it?

Of course it was me.

It just wasn't the me that I identified with.

Notice that although my performance as the Frenchman fell outside my own self-image, it was still within the larger area defined as my Real Self. It had to be. *If it weren't me, I couldn't have done what I did.*

What might we speculate, then, about people who stutter.

For one thing, we might postulate that most of us have a self-image that constricts us. During my many years with the National Stuttering Association, it has been my impression that most of us who have grown up with a stuttering problem are stronger personalities than our self-image will allow — more opinionated, more emotional, more excited (and more exciting!), more turned on, more responsible, more authoritative (and also, less perfect and less nice) than we ever dreamed we could be.

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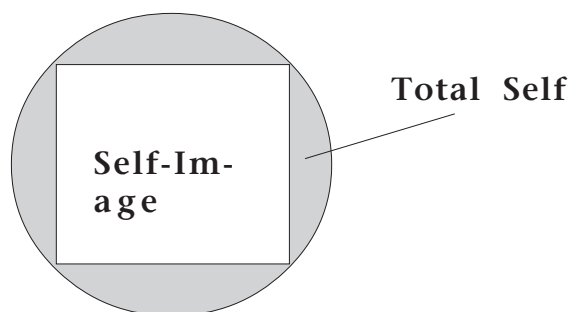


But somewhere along the way we cast ourselves into a diminished role – frequently that of the accommodating person, the Walter Mitty who is more interested in pleasing others than pleasing himself (or herself.) We took our excitement and natural enthusiasm and aliveness—our REAL SELF—and learned how to block it out so no one, *not even we*, could see it.

It was the perfect crime, because after a while we forgot that there ever was a part of ourselves we killed off. There was no *corpus delicti*. The only thing left was the smoking gun, the mechanism that we created to keep our unwanted self in check – the speech block.

What's so insidious about speech blocks – in fact, *any* kind of blocks – is that in masking out those aspects of ourselves we're uncomfortable with, they help to create a confined and sometimes distorted self-image – for example, turning a well-rounded individual into a "square" (see diagram.)

Once that self-image becomes fixed, we then interpret everything that subsequently happens in a way that fits the image. No wonder we become stuck. We confuse our Self-Image with our True Self, and consequently, we never venture beyond to discover what other exciting possibilities might be available to us.



Hatched background indicates areas of the Total Self that have been blocked out. Note how the person has turned himself into a "square."

If you find it easier to speak as someone else, then maybe it's time to look at what it is about your present self-image that doesn't give you that same freedom; then find a way to expand your self-image so that more of you can fit inside. You need to find safe situations where you can try out other roles; a place where you can experiment and search for the total you. It may be therapy. It may be one of the growth trainings such as The Landmark Forum. It may be a Dale Carnegie course or the Toastmasters Club. It may be an NSA chapter meeting, workshop or convention. Whatever.

After all, isn't it time to get out of that constricting straight jacket called a *diminished self-image* and into something that fits?

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## WHY IT'S EASIER TO TALK WHEN NOBODY'S AROUND

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Back in the early 70's I used to commute forty minutes each day from San Francisco to my job with an advertising agency in Palo Alto. And every winter we'd get a spate of drizzly days that always threw me into a dilemma. If you've ever driven through heavy mist, you'll know the problem. This mist is not a real rain, but it is heavy enough so that periodically, it's difficult to see through the windshield.

My dilemma was this: should I ride with the wipers on or off. (This was before they introduced wipers with an "intermittent" setting.)

As usual, I tended to take my cues from what other people were doing. If their wipers were on, I'd keep mine on. If my wipers were on and everyone else had theirs off, I'd feel enormous pressure to turn mine off. And I would.

One winter evening on the way home from work I was wrestling with just such an issue. A light mist had come up and it was becoming difficult to see, so I turned on my wipers. I still remember this moment clearly; racing along US 101 past Candlestick Park and coming up to the 280 turnoff. In fact, I was just approaching the city when a big black Ford Mustang raced by.

And he had his wipers off.

I found myself becoming very antsy. I went along for a moment or two, and then before I realized what I was doing, my hand had reached for the wiper switch and flipped it off. The black car sped off into the twilight, and I found myself straining to see through the smear that was building on the windshield.

"Wait a minute!" I said out loud. "WHY DID I DO THIS? I can't see out of the damn windshield!"

"You know perfectly well why you turned your wipers off," my alter ego said. "The black Mustang had his wipers off,"

"Well big %\*\$&@# deal, I countered. "Suppose I didn't turn the wipers off. So what. What would have happened?"

"Well," said my inner voice, "he would have thought you were...strange."

I could barely make out the black car in the distance. It was just turning off on Army street. Nobody I knew had ever lived on Army street.

"But I don't know him. He doesn't know me. We'll probably never meet

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in this lifetime. And even if I bump into him on the street or at a party, I find it highly unlikely that he'd suddenly recognize me, break into a grin, and cry out so all could hear, "I know you! You were the dummy on Highway 101 who was driving with his windshield wipers on last December 12th when everyone else's wipers were off."

This would never happen.

So why did I have to turn off my wipers?

Then it struck me. I turned off my wipers because I didn't want to appear different. I didn't want to seem strange...

To ME.

It was that way ever since I was a kid. I didn't want talk funny or do anything that would set me apart from others. I just wanted to be accepted; I wanted to belong. So I always refrained from doing anything that would make me stand out.

It was different if I were alone. I could talk to myself in the mirror or read aloud with never any trouble, but the moment anyone entered my field of view, my self-awareness kicked in, and I would start judging myself. How was I doing? Was I okay? Was I doing it right? I was seeing and evaluating myself through the other person's eyes. And that's when I would start to block.

In reality, there was no way I could know what the other person was actually thinking unless I asked. But it would make no difference, because I'd project onto the other person what I was thinking about myself. Then I'd react to that projection by holding back.

Did this happen with everyone? Of course not, because not everyone qualified as a straw man who could reflect back my own feelings. I never stuttered in the presence of a two-year-old, because I couldn't project my judgemental self onto a two-year-old. Ditto, my dog. For someone to trigger my performance fears, that someone had to be old enough or smart enough so I could cast them as a critic.

How did my self-consciousness get started in the first place? My guess is, early on I concluded that being loved was dependent on performing in an acceptable way. As I grew up, I continued to make the same assumptions, and I projected the image of judge onto anyone who could qualify in the role — teachers, bus drivers, storekeepers, you name it.

Why did I do this?

According to transactional analysis, as we grow up, we learn to play three basic roles — child, parent and adult. As we move through life, we flip in and out of these roles, depending on the kind of relationship we're in and what's happening. But many people who stutter seem to chronically lock themselves in a parent/child scenario.

For years, I couldn't drive into a gas station and say "fill it up" to the

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attendant without either feeling like I was ordering him around (parent role), or asking for acceptance (child role). In either case, playing the child or the parent brought up feelings that made me very uncomfortable, feelings I didn't want to experience. So in threatening situations, I'd block them out by not allowing myself to speak. I'd tighten up and create a speech block until the feelings subsided.

There are many people who stutter who feel like a child every time they pick up the phone, or who feel judged every time another person enters the room. For those who carry this burden, the only remedy is to make an effort to see the world...not as they think it is...but as it really is.

I still occasionally become uncomfortable when my wipers are on and other people's aren't. The old tendencies are still there. I'll probably never get over them completely. But instead of automatically shutting my wipers off, I now stop and ask myself — "What do you want?" I question whether my need to be like other people is more important than doing what will give me a greater sense of myself. Usually, by becoming aware, I can choose what I want to do and feel okay about it.

But if the compulsion persists...if I'm still preoccupied with getting the other drivers on the highway to accept me as okay...I use this as an indication that some other relationships in my life aren't going well. Somewhere, things aren't right. I'm not feeling okay about *myself*, and I begin to look for what may be really going on.

I'm not always successful at identifying the problem. But at the very least, I get to clarify one thing. Namely, it's not some anonymous car jockey driving a black Mustang whose approval I'm seeking.

It's my own.

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## YOU CAN CONTROL HOW OTHERS SEE YOU

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A friend once offered a really useful suggestion. “Would you like to control the way other people perceive you?” he asked.

I’m a sucker for this kind of question.

“It’s simple,” he went on. “Just act the way you want to be seen. People won’t know whether that’s the real you or the “act-as-if” you. Most of us never bother to look beyond the obvious. So we’ll take at face value whatever you give us.”

That rule certainly held up at the last NSA Annual Convention. People who had never before spoken before a large a group marched up to the microphone, and after announcing that they were scared to death, proceeded to present themselves as if they’d been talking to audiences for years.

I would have voted any of them into office.

Thinking about “acting as if,” recalls an amusing incident that happened to me 29 years ago. It was a year after I had graduated from college, and I was living with my buddy, Don, in an apartment on West 84th Street in New York City.

Don and I had been to high school together. He was outgoing, a good athlete with craggy features and a rugged charm. He was my oldest friend, and we’d spent many fun times together. But one thing about Don used to really get to me. He was totally unselfconscious. He simply had no awareness or concern about what others thought. How different we were in that respect. I’d grown up with a stuttering problem and was always supersensitive to what I imagined people were thinking.

Don had the annoying habit of walking around the apartment naked with the shades up. I was constantly yelling at him about the neighbors, but he wouldn’t care, and finally I’d give up and just pull down the shades. Despite our different personalities, however, we got along famously.

One Friday evening about 6:30 I was in the living room giving the carpet a once over with the vacuum cleaner. The place was a mess, and we were expecting company. As usual, I was late and still in my underwear.

The door bell rang.

Don went to the door. Damn! I still had to clean up a week’s worth of cigarette ashes from around the couch, so I kept going, figuring that Don

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would hold them off for a moment while I finished. Once again, I had overestimated Don's social consciousness.

"C'mon in," said Don.

I can still see Linda as she looked over Don's shoulder toward me. I knew Linda from high school; she lived down the street from my folks on Long Island. She was really spiffed up for the evening. Smart cocktail dress; pearls. Hell, they were all dressed to the teeth. This wasn't some small burg. This was New York City on a Friday night and they were smart-looking city people ready for a night on the town and they were walking into the living room where I was vacuuming and I was in my underwear and it wasn't a dream, IT WAS REALLY HAPPENING!

As they slowly and awkwardly entered the room, I made a decision. It was probably the fastest decision I've ever made, because I didn't have more than a split second to weigh the alternatives. Which were (1) running out of the room and looking like a fool, (2) walking out of the room and looking like a fool, (3) apologizing and not only looking like a fool but feeling very self-conscious and put down like I did when I stuttered or (4) staying right where I was.

I stayed right where I was.

"Oh hi," I said in my most offhanded manner, acting like this was a daily occurrence. I continued on with the vacuuming. Not only did I do the area around the couch, I even went back and vacuumed under the table again.

"Be outa here in a second," I said. I noticed they were looking at me curiously, as though I were some kind of exhibit.

"How was the traffic coming over here?" I asked. (At that moment I was as interested in the traffic as I was in the price of ant farms in Nigeria.)

"Fine," someone said. "Not too bad."

My jockey shorts were certainly a striking contrast to what the other men in the room were wearing. They all had on smart blue suits. And vests.

"I'm running a little late." I acknowledged (as if the fact were not already apparent.)

Very gradually and with supreme self-control I vacuumed my way a square inch at a time into the hallway.

"I'm just about done," I called back. "Gimme about five minutes." Centuries passed while I vacuumed my way down the hall and slowly turned the corner at about four inches an hour. I can't remember when, before or since, I've exhibited this level of restraint.

Then, finally, I was free.

I was free. I was mortified. And I wanted to crawl into a hole. But my guests didn't know because I was so matter of fact and up front about what had happened. I was damned if I was going to let my embarrassment run me. I dressed quickly, and ten minutes later I was back in the living room

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pouring drinks.

Later, I heard that one of the girls was upset at my impropriety. She figured this “beatnik behavior” was my usual life style. (I could live with that.) However, since I apparently was not embarrassed, neither were they, and after a few jokes about “dressing for the occasion” the incident passed without further comment.

I never forgot that night. (Who could!) Nor, I might add, did I forget the lesson it taught me: “People relate to you the way you relate to you.” That’s particularly true of stuttering. If you’re uncomfortable, look away, shuffle your feet, get panicky, the people you’re talking to will pick up on your feelings and feel uncomfortable, too. But if you’re straightforward, up front, maintain eye contact, and look like you *want* to be where you are (even if you’re vacuuming in your underwear), your listeners aren’t likely to be put off by your disfluency.

Surprisingly, most people don’t really know *what* they should be feeling, so they look around for cues. Filmmakers understand this. When the thug draws a gun, the camera always cuts away to show how someone else is reacting. Does the bystander look worried? Oh-oh. Here’s trouble, and our pulse quickens. But now the director cuts to a close-up of the cop. Look! It’s Sylvester Stallone. He’s Cobra. He’s cool. He knows something we don’t know. We begin to relax. What the filmmaker is really doing is programming how he wants us to react.

A couple of years ago during an acting class, I had a brand new opportunity to see this principle in action. But first, a little background. As a student in high school I didn’t know which I was more afraid of: stuttering (speech block) or going blank in front of the class (memory block). Even now, when I get the least bit uncomfortable, my memory for names, facts, etc. simply leaves town. Once I even forgot the name of my favorite aunt at a family get-together, an incident she still kids me about.

However, after years of Dale Carnegie, Toastmasters, and especially impromptu speaking at NSP meetings, I felt confident enough to tackle this fear head on. So I signed up for acting school.

We now advance midway through my first course: “Acting for TV.” (Nothing like starting off with something *easy*, right?) It’s 11 o’clock at the end of a long evening. I’m in front of 22 fellow students. Plus the teacher. Plus the guy who’s operating the TV camera. I’m doing a monologue, which is the hardest kind of exercise, because I’m up there all alone. There’s no other actor to play off of. It’s a scene from “Death of a Salesman”, and I’m acting the part of Willy Loman.

The teacher counts down. “Five...four...three...two...one,” and gives me the sign. The red eye on the TV camera starts blinking. I begin.

Nothing feels right; I can’t lose my self-consciousness. And then, 20

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seconds into the scene, I go totally blank. My worst fear has been realized.

The teacher had told us that when you forget a line, you should stay in character and see if you can pick it up again. So, continuing to act as Willy Loman, I hem, I haw, I ad-lib, I fake it. Nothing works. My mind has totally closed down. Finally, sometime between 30 seconds and 30 years, I say “cut.”

There I am “in my underwear” again, feeling mortified, with everyone looking on.

“Dammit,” I say in a loud voice. “For 45 years I’ve been waiting for this to happen. And it just did.”

And I laugh.

Then everyone laughs.

This breaks the tension. I begin again and get through the scene. I’m not great. But I’ve survived my worse fear. What’s more, the people in the room are supporting me.

In recalling the incident, I’m aware it was a turning point. It would have been easy to put up a wall. I could have allowed the embarrassment to drive me from the class. But I didn’t. By publicly acknowledging my lapse of memory, and then laughing at myself, I told the audience exactly how I wanted them to react. And what do you know, they followed my instructions to the letter.

So the next time you find yourself in a speech block, don’t assume that everyone is thinking bad thoughts because you’re stuttering. Most people don’t know how to react. That’s why they look to you to guide them, so just remember this simple rule:

People relate to you the way *you* relate to you.

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## CREATING A SETTING FOR FLUENCY

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**E**ver own a ring with a stone in it? Got one on your finger right now? Hold it up close to your eye.

Notice how perfectly the setting is configured to support that particular stone. Notice the snug fit.

Let's say your ring holds a one carat diamond. Think you can replace it with a two carat stone?

Not without changing the setting.

Seems obvious, doesn't it.

Well, guess what. Your speech works the same way. You — the total you — are the setting for your speech. And the only speech patterns you'll ever be comfortable with are those which reflect who you are.

Back to the ring. You could try and fit a differently shaped stone into that setting. You even might get it to stay...for a little while. But you know what'll happen? The setting will stand the stress of the misfit for just so long. And then, when you're not looking...POP!...the stone will fall out.

Isn't that the experience so many people who stutter have with therapy programs? Here you've coughed up several thousand dollars to go through a fluency shaping program...or an air flow program...or spent months working with a delayed auditory feedback machine. And you made no real progress. Or maybe you've upped your level of fluency substantially, only to see it slip back in the weeks and months that follow.

"Why?" you ask. "Why, why, why?"

You won't find the answer by continuing to look for the Holy Grail (the one therapy program that works). You'll have a lot better luck if you go about changing the "setting" that supports your particular speaking behavior.

Let me explain.

## GETTING EVERYTHING INTO ALIGNMENT

Your mind and your body each are marvelously interconnected mechanisms. I have a taste of that every few months when I stop in to see my osteopath. My complaint is usually a sore muscle in my lower back, one of

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those frustrating aches deep inside that I can't put my finger on, but which hurts when I bend over. Except that Dr. Chapman never starts out working on my lower back. That comes later. She begins with my hips, progresses to my rib cage, and loosens other muscles that I would never expect were involved.

What I've discovered is that the body is a web of interconnections, and that when one muscle becomes injured, I unconsciously adjust other muscles to compensate. Dr. Chapman not only has to release the spasmed lower back muscle; she also has to release all the supporting muscles in the other parts of my body. If she doesn't disable the "system" that I've created to compensate for the spasmed lower back muscle, the recovered muscle will find itself in an "alien" environment — one that it set up to support a sick muscle. And guess what? Since nature abhors a vacuum, I will somehow reinjure my back muscle so that the compensatory system I've created can once more be in balance.

Stated another way, my spasmed lower back is the "jewel". And the rest of my body is the "setting" that holds this jewel in place.

Your psyche works the same way.

As a child with a speech problem, you made certain psychological adjustments to compensate for your speech...and especially, for the negative emotions associated with stuttering.

Over a period of years these adjustments became a part of your basic personality. For example, you might have assumed the role of a helpless, dependent person so that other people would have to talk for you. You might have avoided sharing your feelings, because feelings — anger, hurt, even joy — caused you to stutter all the more. And of course, people who stutter should never be assertive, because their slow speech is an imposition on others. Since you desperately needed the approval of others, it was always necessary to assume an apologetic posture.

Then one day you're thirty years old and you read about this terrific new therapy program. All kinds of people have attested to its efficacy. So you fork over the cash, commit yourself to the struggle, set aside a block of time, and away you go.

Lo and behold, you get results. In the room with the therapist you talk freely for the first time. It is exhilarating. With the therapist's encouragement, you step into the world, conquer the fear of talking to strangers, make a zillion phone calls for merchandise you'll never buy, and prove to yourself that the monster, indeed, has feet of clay. It can be conquered. Of course, not everyone reaches this level of success, but almost everyone who makes the effort will show some degree of improvement.

Therapy ends and heady with success, you move out on your own.

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And then one day you have a relapse.

Who knows what caused it. It could be a boss who assumes a parental role. It could be a dashed hope. A rejection. It could be anything.

The one thing you do know is that you're back in that old, hated familiar territory again. Blocked. Scared. Disfluent as hell. Your new lack of confidence pulls the rug out from under you. In desperation, you fall back into old speech habits, until one day, it's like that heady trip with the therapist never ever happened.

The response is totally appropriate.

You see, you thought you could change the stone without changing the setting.

Did you do anything about your posture of helplessness? Or your reluctance to communicate your feelings? Or your lack of self-assertiveness? Or your unwillingness to be totally responsible? Or your constant, grinding need for approval?

Oh, you didn't?

But these were all the adjustments you made to support a stuttering habit. If you didn't change the components in this system, the system has just been sitting around waiting for the missing component — your stuttering — to reappear.

Sure enough, one day it does.

And everything is back in balance.

Then along comes the National Stuttering Association (or some other group designed to promote personal growth.) The organization says, "Now's the time to take charge of your life. Right now. Before you're fluent. Before everything is perfect. Right this very minute. Here's a terrific opportunity.

Afraid of being responsible? Take on a role and help the organization to grow.

If you're afraid of speaking in front of a group, find a chapter of Speakers Club or Toastmasters, and give it a try. You can't find a more supportive group of people.

Afraid of asking a girl for a date? Try it anyway, and if you don't succeed, share the experience with others on an Internet discussion group or at a stuttering self-help meeting.

If you're in the dark about how to be assertive, and most of us are — we confuse assertiveness with aggressiveness — sign up for a self-assertion class. Or if that's too scary, at least buy a book about it, and then read it!

All of these efforts will pay off, because they'll help you to change the very negative, repressive behaviors that support your speech blocks.

Ironically, only one person in ten will ever take a stab at this. Most of

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us will continue to try and change our stuttering without changing the “setting” that holds this behavior firmly in place.

Why?

Because we have a huge investment in the status quo. We may not like what we have, but it’s all familiar and totally predictable. To take a chance means to step into the unknown.

Most of us hate stepping into the unknown. We act like the man who drops his car keys on the lawn at night, but insists on looking for them on the sidewalk under the street light...simply because he can see better there. We don't want to risk. But the truth is, there's little likelihood of success in the safe, familiar places. Just observe your success rate to date. To find what you're searching for, you have to look where you have never looked before.

So do you want a good place to start? Let’s see how serious you are. List all the ways you can think of that you changed your life to compensate for your stuttering.

Now put a check after each one you’re willing to give up.

Make a list on a separate sheet of paper indicating what you are willing to start doing right now to strengthen this weakness. And indicate when you are going to start doing something about it.

I dare you to take the first step.

One final observation. It has been my privilege to meet a number of people who have really changed their ability to communicate. Some have made remarkable progress in therapy. And all of them, without exception, had already made the changes in their lives to support an easier, more fluent way of speaking.

Remember, if you want your ring to have a larger stone, you also have to change the setting.

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## ON BEING DIFFERENT

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Back in the early 70s my wife and I spent an adventurous two weeks in Morocco, and the third day of the trip found us in the little mountain town of Chechaouene. After breakfast, we set out to tour the *medina*, or Arab quarter, with a little 12-year-old boy who had adopted us and who was determined to be our “official” guide. As we wended our way through the narrow whitewashed streets, we came upon a group of young girls on their way to school. For a few minutes we all walked together which gave me a wonderful opportunity to practice my French. For me, as always, it was deeply satisfying to connect with people of another culture, and in their own language as well.

As the girls and I seemed to be developing an easy rapport, I thought I would have a little fun with the group and decided to play a game with them that I had learned years ago from an old friend of the family.

“J’ai une souris dans la poche (I have a mouse in my pocket),” I said to them, at which time I reached into my pocket and pulled out my hand, slightly cupped, as if it contained a mouse.

“Ecoute, elle va parler.” I said. (Listen, it’s going to speak.) At that point, just like the old family friend did years ago, I squeezed my palms together several times and then pulled them apart, each time making a squeaking sound that was caused by the breaking suction.

Then I balled up both fists. “Dans quelle main est la souris?” (In which hand is the mouse?) I said to one of the little girls. She pointed to one of the closed fists.

“Ah, non,” I said, “Ce n’est pas là.” (It’s not there.) I opened my fist to show it was empty. Then I closed both fists again.

“Où est la souris maintenant?”

The little girl pointed to the other closed fist.

I pretended that I was transferring the mouse between hands, then opened the fist that “formerly” held the mouse to reveal that it was empty.

“Non, ce n’est pas là.”

“It’s in the other hand,” the little girls shouted. “Open the other hand.”

Again, I made a show of supposedly transferring the mouse and then opened the hand from which the transfer had been made. “Non, ce n’est

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pas la," I said, showing them my empty palm.

They thought they were on to me. "It's in the other hand," they said excitedly. At this point I extended both hands and simultaneously opened them to show that they were empty.

"Elle a disparue." (It's gone!)

That stopped them cold. No mouse.

Now was the crowning moment of the ruse. When I was a little kid, the family friend had reached behind my ear and said, "Here it is. It was in your ear." And he had made a pretense of grabbing at my ear and pulling something out of it back into his hands. Then he squeaked his palms together to show that once again the mouse was safely in his hands.

"Ah, la voila!" (There it is!) I said and reached toward the ear of the nearest girl. As my hand approached her ear, she jumped back, startled. Then all the girls jumped back away from me. Suddenly, I was standing there alone.

Their reaction startled me, and my heart started beating madly. People I had been in intimate contact with had unexpectedly recoiled from me. I felt like a leper.

Making my best effort to look nonplused, I continued on with the routine, showing (by squeaking my hands) that once again the mouse was safely hidden between my palms.

The girls continued to relate to me, but from a safe distance. Eventually, they turned off toward the school, and Doris and I and our young guide continued our tour of the medina.

I was upset by the event, and that upset persisted for more than two days. It didn't make sense. It didn't seem like what happened should have been such a big deal, yet, I was profoundly distressed and couldn't shake myself out of it. Why was my reaction dragging on for so long? What in the world was this all about?

I became intrigued. The feelings were familiar. I had experienced them before. But where?

Ah yes, I remembered. I had experienced them whenever I had been locked up in a lengthy speech block, and people had looked at me strangely. I would be in school or in a social situation. I'd lock up and couldn't talk, and then I'd be upset for several days afterward because I thought I'd appeared weird. The feelings were identical. However, this incident in Chechaouene was not about stuttering. But if it wasn't stuttering that got me so upset, then what was it? That was a real head scratcher.

It came to me while we were in a little shop buying trinkets.

I was afraid of being different. Being different meant that people might turn away from me, and I might lose my connection with them.

My fear of being different was a bottom line issue in my life. As we

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drove through the desolate Moroccan landscape on the way to the sprawling markets of Fez, I started playing with the concept. I asked myself, "Suppose that all four billion people in the world stuttered. Suppose stuttering was the norm. Would my speech blocks have been a problem?"

Of course not.

What I understood, as we drove the highway through the stark countryside, was that my negative feelings about being a stutterer were never, at the deepest level, about stuttering. My fear was in being different, in looking strange. I wanted to be like other people. I wanted others to be comfortable with me. I wanted to belong. Consequently, to avoid any risk of upsetting others, I was constantly modifying and adjusting myself until I presented an image that they liked, because I believed that pleasing people was the only choice I had. Unfortunately, in changing myself to please others, I paid a price, because I lost contact with the real me.

It was a hard bit of reality to swallow, but there it was. For years, I had given away my power to people I thought could make me okay, which was everybody. I had allowed other people to define my life, simply because I thought I needed something from them. I would do anything not to look different, and thus, I was quick to hold back my spontaneity if I felt that it might be judged. For years, I had restrained myself in my speech, and this bottling up of energy contributed to my speech blocks. Now, I could see so clearly that the self-judging and the holding back were still present in my life. True, I didn't let the reaction of the schoolgirls stop me from connecting with them. That was good. But inside, I had died a small death because they had jumped back from me.

I had taken it personally.

Thirty-five years have passed since our trip to Morocco, but the reality of that morning encounter in Chechaouene remains with me. I know that my oversensitivity to other people's reactions is something I need to stay aware of. If I hold back, or apologize for who I am, or only reveal a sanitized version of myself, I stop feeling good about myself. If I do this too much, I can initiate a downward spiral. If I allow it to go on too long, well, who knows. Perhaps I could even bring back the mindset, feelings, and beliefs that created the stuttering system. Would the stuttering blocks come back? Theoretically, I guess they could. But before that happened, I'd have to turn a blind eye to everything I have learned and experienced.

My Moroccan encounter was useful in that it showed me how much I still looked to others for validation. What about you? Can you allow people to have their own reactions, even if those reactions are not what you'd like them to be? Or do you take everything personally?

Do you hold back only in your speech, or do you hold back in other areas

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of your life as well? How much of yourself are you willing to give away in order to have someone say that you're okay?

How much do you blame your stuttering for the "inability" to do what you want to do, when in reality, your problem may lie in how you give away your power.

If you currently block or struggle when you speak, are you willing to be up front about it? Or are you compelled to hide what is real, just so you can feel you're not different from everybody else?

If you're afraid of being different, how can you possibly say and do the things that are important in your life? And if you don't show us the real you, then how are you ever going to give up the protective behavior that underlies the speech block?

For me, recovery from stuttering began when I was willing to own up to what I thought and felt and be fully up front about it. I had to assert myself in risky situations, have my discomfort level zoom off the scale, and still reveal who I was and what I was feeling. I had to start making it okay for me to be me.

Giving up protective behavior begins by recognizing that, indeed, all of us are different. This difference isn't bad *or* good. It's just who we are, despite what someone else may think. Embracing who we are and recognizing our own uniqueness is what gets us in touch with our power, and that, in turn, is what leads to easier, more expressive speech. When we unleash that power—as the NSA's Russ Hicks found out when he won the Regional III Humorous Speech contest in competition with more than 30,000 Toastmasters—people will relate to us positively, stuttering and all.

For the Moroccan schoolgirls, now all grown up, the American with the mouse-in-his-hands has probably faded to a pleasant and amusing story. For me, it was a reminder that although the stuttering had gone, the mindset had not, and that I still had some real work ahead of me.

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PART

3

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IT'S ALL IN HOW YOU SEE IT

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## P A R T 3

**B**ack in high school I became very curious about what was going on with my speech, and the more life experience I amassed, the more I observed how my speech was intimately connected to aspects of my life that I hadn't been paying attention to.

But observation, *per se*, is not a guaranteed road to the truth. It depends on *how* you observe. If you only see what you want to see, there's little chance of breaking "out of the box." By contrast, those who can observe without bias and with an open mind have a chance of moving beyond the obvious, making new discoveries, and finding new and fresh perspectives.

What makes a good observer?

A good observer doesn't force things to make sense when they don't really want to. It's being able to see without preconceptions. It means keeping an open mind, even when answers are not forthcoming. The greatest breakthroughs come when we are willing to stand in the unknown, observe with an open mind, and resist making premature conclusions.

The pieces in this section all touch on the powers of observation in one way or another. Some make observations that go against current thinking. Others call attention to aspects of speaking that are so obvious that we don't notice them. And yet others show how the world can rewrite itself when you observe from a different perspective.

As you read through these stories, you'll discover that being a clear and impartial observer is a vital key to the recovery process.

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## THE POWER OF OBSERVATION

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Some years ago at a holistic health center I heard a provocative talk by Frijof Capra, author of the landmark book *The Tao of Physics*. Capra had been one of the wave of brilliant young physicists who was helping to revise our understanding of how the universe was put together. But Capra was more than just a scientist. In the 60s he also became fascinated with Eastern religion and philosophy, and spent considerable time exploring the links between Western and Eastern thought. His seminal book *The Tao of Physics* was a synthesis of his observations.

What I remember most from his talk was his awe and fascination with the strikingly different routes that thinkers have taken to arrive at the same conclusions. He told us that what most amazed him was that through meditation and thought, ancient Chinese seers five thousand years ago had come up with essentially the same picture of the universe that Capra and his band of brilliant young physicists had constructed using the disciplines of modern physics.

Said Capra - We arrived at those advanced concepts through careful scientific reasoning. The Chinese got there by simply observing.

People underestimate the power of observation. I once had a rancorous interchange on an Internet stuttering forum with a member of the National Stuttering Project who was incensed that I had the audacity to put forth my observations and ideas about stuttering in such positive terms. He felt I should “stay in my place” and leave such investigations to the people in the white lab coats who were “much more qualified” to address these issues and who “really knew” what they were doing. He was convinced that the answers to stuttering would eventually be discovered by scientists who would then spoon feed it to the stuttering community.

Those of us who grow up with an overly high regard for authority are likely to sit back and allow those with letters after their names to preempt our thinking and formulate our truths, simply because, as professionals, they “know” what they’re doing. In doing so, we downplay our own ability to make significant discoveries through self-observation and by observing the behavior of others. After all, how important could our own observations be? We’re not recognized authorities in the field. We haven’t read, or

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written, the right textbooks. What could we know of importance?

What, indeed.

People I've met who have substantially or totally recovered from stuttering have shown themselves to be consummate observers. Each was able to speak from a unique position of authority—that is, from the point of view of his or her own experience. These individuals have known how to use their observations to work through the complexities that underlie their own stuttering syndrome.

Ninety-five percent of all the material in this book has been arrived at simply by observing my own thoughts and feelings, and listening to how other people described theirs. In fact, I made stuttering disappear from my life a good while before the blocking behaviors actually left simply by observing what I was doing in a different light. When I stopped observing my problem through the narrow perspective of “stuttering,” the stuttering *per se* was gone—that is, I stopped seeing behavior as something called “stuttering”—and in its place was a handful of other problems in a unique relationship that needed to be addressed. By individually addressing these issues, the actual physical blocking behaviors slowly diminished and disappeared over time.

From this experience has emerged a few useful rules. One of the most functional is that *all personal change begins with observation*.

But a particular kind of observation.

If we keep looking at our experiences through a familiar window, the same familiar sights and truths are going to keep surfacing. The “window” through which we see the problem has a powerful influence in shaping our perception. For example, a starving man will look at a restaurant menu a lot differently than someone who has just finished off a six course dinner. A local meteorologist will notice different things about a Hawaiian sunset than a painter on holiday. And a psychiatric social worker will perceive a convicted felon in a different light than an assistant district attorney or the warden of the local prison. To a substantial degree, what is important to the individual and what he or she *expects* to see has an enormous impact on what he or she actually observes.

The challenge, then, is to learn to observe *objectively*.

## *HOW TO OBSERVE LIKE SHERLOCK HOLMES*

One day in 1945 a Raytheon engineer named Percy LeBaron Spencer made an unusual discovery. Spencer was building magnetrons - critical components used in radar systems. One day, Spencer reached into his pocket for the chocolate peanut bar he kept as a snack when he made a startling discovery. The candy bar had melted. How could that be? What could have

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caused this?

Then Spencer had a thought. A little earlier he had walked past an active radar tube. Perhaps the energy from the radar tube had melted the bar. Intrigued, Spencer tried an experiment. He placed a small bowl of popping corn in front of the tube, and it wasn't but a few moments before a fountain of popcorn was cascading from the bowl. Today, millions of people find food preparation easier and faster, thanks to the development of the microwave oven.

Spencer was a good observer, and if you want to defeat your stuttering, you, too, need to be a good observer. There's a lot more to stuttering than meets the eye, and to make significant progress, you need to observe with an open mind. You need to be good at noticing what's going on. You need to leave your expectations at the door and simply show up ready to see what you can see.

In short, you have to observe like detective Sherlock Holmes.

## *FINDING WHAT YOU WEREN'T LOOKING FOR*

Holmes' formula was quite simple:

**Be observant.** Take note of everything you're seeing and experiencing. Sherlock Holmes often pieced together facts that other people overlooked simply because he was a keen observer. Try walking into a room, do a quick glance around and then close your eyes and try to remember as much as possible. Try remembering how many people there were, what they were wearing, what the room arrangement was, what was hanging on the walls, etc. It's good practice.

**Expect anything.** Holmes said that whenever you have eliminated all other things, whatever is left no matter how unbelievable must be the truth. So first observe. Then see if anything goes together.

**Question everything.** Sherlock Holmes said that nothing is more deceptive than an obvious fact. So don't take anything as fact simply because someone says it is.

The stuttering-related concepts and information in this book do not come from research projects or statistical studies. They don't come from genetic analyses or MRI scans. Everything in this book is based on observations that you can make yourself.

What you will learn from this book has proven helpful to hundreds and hundreds of PWS who have significantly improved, and in some cases completely recovered from their stuttering and blocking.

By nature, we tend to be impatient. We like quick answers. But stuttering doesn't fit that profile. Stuttering involves all of you. It has a number of components. To change the system, you have to first identify the pieces

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and then see how every thing fits together. All this requires you to be a good observer.

Let's take an example unrelated to stuttering. Let's say you were given the following image and asked to make sense of it.



What could this be?

Hard to tell. It looks a little like the Spanish peninsula. But we've not been given enough to say anything definite, so the most we can do is observe it and set it aside for the moment.



Then someone gives us another piece. Well, this has a weird shape. Could it be a book with its pages open sitting atop a table. Maybe.



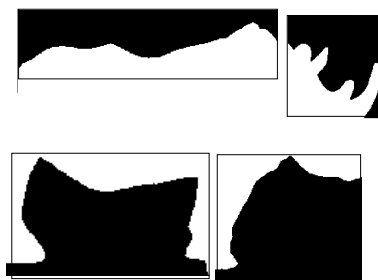
This one is easy. Can you see it? A laughing face looking down to the left.



And finally we get a fourth piece. Is this a mountain range? Is it a pile of compost?

Individually, it's hard to figure out what the visuals are all about. But when you start putting the pieces together in different arrangements, you may suddenly stumble on relationships you didn't see before.





"Oh wow. It's a rhinoceros."

Errrr...not so fast!

What you've been looking at are pieces that only describe the *space* around a rhinoceros, but it's enough to show you what's there. This same principle applies to your stuttering. Look with an open mind at everything that's happening around your speech, and there's a good chance you'll discover many hidden factors that contribute to your stuttering.

Notice what kinds of circumstances or situations make you most uneasy or most confident. Notice the situations in which it's easiest or hardest to speak. If you keep trying to make sense of it, you'll begin to see patterns. You'll begin to understand how you think and perceive, what your beliefs are and the way it all connects to your speech. That's the path to understanding your stuttering and rising above it.

This book was built on the observations of speaking experiences made over 25 years by myself and by a number of other contributors.

Readers report that *REDEFINING STUTTERING* has helped them reframe their perception of stuttering so that today they see their disfluency, not as simply a speech disability, but as a system that involves all of who they are.

## *EXPLODING YOUR TUNNEL VISION*

Most of us are creatures of habit, and nowhere is this more apparent than when it comes to our powers of observation. For example, somebody rushes in all hot and bothered and blurts out, "Did you see what Bob DID?" and proceeds to run the riot act on Bob. Bob was unjust. Bob was inconsiderate. Bob was this or that. How easy it is to accept someone else's word about Bob, especially if the person presents her case with conviction. Then we bump into Bob, and poor old Bob doesn't have a chance. We're already mad at Bob, even though we don't know for certain that he did any of the things that our friend was accusing him of. We proceed to interpret everything that Bob says and does through a set of "anger-colored glasses," because *something is wrong with the way Bob is conducting himself*.

The very same process takes place around stuttering. We have a situation in which our speech gets hung up. We want to speak, but we can't. Yet,

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someone is waiting for us to say something. So where does our focus naturally turn? To our speech, naturally. We look at the problem through “stuttering-colored glasses,” because *something is wrong with the way we speak*.

We then go outside and climb into our car and start it up, but when we give it gas, the car doesn’t move.

What’s the problem?

If we apply the same kind of logic, we’d naturally look at the wheels.

They’re not turning, because *something is wrong with the car’s wheels*.

Except we know better. We know that the wheels are only part of the system that propels our car. After we check to see that the wheels aren’t blocked by something in the road, we expand our thinking into the other parts of the system. Is the clutch slipping? Is the differential broken? Since we’ve already had occasions to look under the hood, we’re aware that our car is a system, composed of hundreds of parts that relate in a certain way. If one or several of those parts don’t function properly, the net result is that the wheels don’t turn. The reason why we don’t automatically fixate on the wheels is that we view the car through “system-colored glasses.”

The habitual ways in which we view events has to do with our knowledge and our beliefs. If we are out of touch with our emotions, perceptions, beliefs, intentions and physiological responses, then our physical behavior is the only part of the system that we can see, and it becomes very easy to assume that it’s the cause of our problem. If our speech doesn’t work right, that’s where we focus. Given the circumstances, it’s logical.

Speech therapists who focus primarily on speech are likely to contribute to the problem, because they keep our focus limited only to the physiology of speech production. What’s more, even when our emotions, perceptions, and beliefs are discussed, they are usually presented as an *outgrowth* of our stuttering—things that must be dealt with because we stutter. But this is only half of the truth. What is usually not discussed, mainly because it is not understood, is the way our emotions, perceptions, and beliefs can also *create* the blocking behavior.

The reason why this second half is overlooked has much to do with the word “stuttering,” itself. The word is not functional, because it focuses only on our behavior, instead of what drives the behavior, and therefore, it does not encourage us to dig further.

## *LANGUAGE SHAPES THE WAY WE PERCEIVE*

When I was growing up in New York, I was aware of only four kinds of snow. *Slush* resulted when a good snowfall was followed by rain. *Icy/crusty*

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*snow* was snow whose surface had frozen over and was crackly and brittle. *Powder snow* was soft and airy and usually found its way into my jacket as I rolled about. But the best snow of all was *packing snow*, because from this you could make snowballs and igloos and snowmen. Thus, fifty years ago if you'd asked me how many kinds of snow there were, I would have told you "four."

By contrast, the Eskimos have over 26 different words for snow, because their livelihood and even their lives depend on observing subtle differences. Each of the various names draws attention to a different quality or aspect of snow. This expanded vocabulary gives the Eskimo a much more acute perception of snow than some kid in New York who's waiting, snowball in hand, for the kid next door to walk out of his front door. The Eskimo is able to *see* more, because he is looking at snow through a bigger, broader window.

What does this have to do with how we perceive stuttering? Many people know only of "primary stuttering" and "secondary stuttering"—one term describing a kind of effortless disfluency while the other word describing the familiar blocking and struggle behaviors. Both terms use the common word "stuttering" which assumes they are branches from the same tree.

The two kinds of speech behavior may look alike, but in reality, they are very different, and grouping them together under the same general heading of "stuttering" forces us to make assumptions and create relationships that may or may not exist. Because of the potential for confusion, I found it necessary to coin a new word—*bobulating*—to accommodate the significant differences between blocked speech and the stumblings associated with being upset, confused, or discombobulated. In the following example, notice how much clearer it is when we have two words to help distinguish between similar sounding speech patterns that in reality are quite different.

*Four-year-old Richie rushes up to his mom and blurts out, "Look, Mommy, I found a dan-dan-dan-dandelion."*

*What's going on?*

*Richie is excited, his emotions are stirred and he's wrestling with (for him) a new and complex word: dandelion. At the same time, he is totally unselfconscious about his speech. His focus is on communicating his discovery. At that moment his world is no less thrilling than it was for Thomas Edison the first time he connected two wires and caused the world's first electric light to glow.*

*Compare that experience to this one. George is a young college freshman on a first date with Marcia, a pretty coed at his school. George is really taken by Marcia and feels at risk, since he's not sure that he can measure up to her expectations. After much hemming and*

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*hawing he's invited Marcia out for a picnic and is anxious to make a good impression. Now they're out in the meadow together. The blanket is spread out, and the lunch that George thoughtfully and carefully prepared is beautifully laid out. They're just about to settle down when George spies a particularly stunning dandelion. He stoops to pick it, then offers it to Marcia.*

*"Look at this gorgeous dan-dan-dan-dan-dandelion," he says with his heart pounding.*

*George has a fear of saying "dandelion." He manages to say "dan" okay, but there is a fear about completing the word. On the other hand, he has an even bigger fear about starting the word and then lapsing into a long embarrassing silence. So he keeps hammering away at the word, repeating "dan" over and over until he feels free enough to complete the word.*

*George's repetitions are driven by an entirely different dynamic than Richie's. Yet, they sound exactly alike. For this reason it is absolutely essential to have different words to describe what each person is doing. Just saying that both Richie and George are stuttering creates confusion and covers over the real issues. One kind of disfluency is an unselfconscious reflex, a struggle with verbal skills and maybe a tendency to overreact to stress. The other is a strategy, usually accompanied by a great deal of self-consciousness, to push through what is perceived as a difficult and threatening speech block.*

*Thus, if you say that Richie is bobulating and George is blocking, you are able to immediately see significant differences. What's more, Richie's mom doesn't have to get all crazy because he's "stuttering." She knows the differences between bobulating and blocking, and can more easily decide when it might be appropriate to initiate some kind of remedial action.*

Enhancing my language around stuttering was very important in broadening my ability to observe my speech difficulties. By not seeing my problem as "stuttering" but as a combination of a speech block (a holding back) and a strategy to break through or avoid the block, I was encouraged to direct my focus into areas where previously I would not have thought to look.

"Why am I stuttering" is also a kind of mushy question that is hard to respond to, especially since most people don't have a clear understanding of what stuttering is, whereas "Why am I blocking?" or even better, "What am I holding back?" is an issue that is potentially more productive. Other questions logically flow from it, such as "Suppose that I didn't block in this situation? What might happen?" Of course, most people's first response is to say, "I might stutter." But if you're willing to look past the obvious, you

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may find other things that you're afraid will surface and that have to be kept under control. It may be a forbidden emotion. It could be an awareness of an issue you don't want to deal with. It could be a feeling of vulnerability that seems too much to handle. Any of these could deter you from speaking until you are feeling ready. As Tony Robbins notes in his book *Awaken the Giant Within*, "it's not the actual pain that drives us, but our fear that something will lead to pain. We're not driven by the reality but by our *perception* of reality."

There are several disciplines that can help you to perceive more clearly and accurately. A couple that I'm familiar with are *general semantics* and *neuro-linguistic programming*.

General semantics deals with how we perceive the world and how the language we use has an influence in shaping that perception, often locking us into seeing the world in a particular way. Wendell Johnson was best known for his writings on stuttering, but he was also a persuasive advocate for general semantics, and his landmark book *People in Quandaries* is in my estimation the clearest exposition of the discipline. Another good book on general semantics is S. I. Hayakawa's *Language in Thought and Action* which became a Book of the Month Club selection some years ago.

*Neuro-linguistic programming* (NLP), which is enjoying a growing popularity across many sectors of the population, has often been described as "software for the brain." The brain, in this case, is the human computer that takes in sensory data, interprets it, organizes and stores it. The "software programs" it creates are what we rely upon for day to day living. These programs are usually randomly created by the people and events in our life. NLP is the study of how to reinforce, refine or change those programs. Through NLP, it is possible to bring to light our unconscious perceptions and to understand, evaluate and change our attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors to be congruent with our deepest life values and goals.

The following four pieces are written by people who are all good observers, and who stumbled on useful and interesting insights about their stuttering by allowing themselves to observe with an open mind and to question and challenge what they perceived. Observations like these, made over a period of time, can help you substantially change your perception of how you're thinking, feeling, and acting whenever you find yourself blocking and struggling to speak.

## **WHAT I'VE OBSERVED ABOUT STUTTERING**

**by Babak Charepoo**

*At the time this was written, Babak Charepoo was 31 years old and living in Phoenix, Arizona. He was working for a consulting firm designing communication*

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*networks for corporations. Originally from Iran, he has lived in different parts of the U.S. since coming here at the age of four.*

I have had a stuttering problem for most of my life. When I was younger, my stuttering was very peculiar in that it had two faces. I never stuttered in public, nor did I have the mentality that usually goes with stuttering when I was in public. But when I communicated with my family, you could bet even money that I would stutter. I didn't understand why this was for a long time.

I made it through my college years without a hitch. I gave oral presentations and had to defend my senior thesis in economics in front of a panel of four professors. I never stuttered. I had many friends that, until recently, never experienced my stuttering. When I used to tell them I had a stuttering problem, they thought I was joking.

Then something happened after I graduated from college. I was getting tired and exhausted. Even though I was fluent in situations outside of the home, I was tired of hiding. I was fluent on the outside, but I still considered myself a stutterer, and it was eating away at me on the inside. I didn't understand the stuttering. I felt helpless and alone. But I knew there had to be a way out, so I started searching.

My search began in the library. I looked up "stuttering" and found about 20 books. I read for hours and hours. This was a great relief for me because I realized that I was not alone. But what those books had to say did not answer my questions. I continued my search.

I met a great speech therapist in Pittsburgh. He helped me open the doors to many opportunities, including having the confidence to start my own business. Just what I had always wanted to do! But as good as my therapist was, I eventually had more questions about stuttering that his model was not able to answer for me. Questions like, "Why am I fluent outside of the home, but when I speak with my family I stutter? Why is it that when I think of myself as a stutterer I will stutter, but when I forget that I stutter, I am fluent?"

Just to clarify, I did not come from an abusive home. My parents and sisters were loving towards me, and they were always patient to hear what I had to say.

Recently, I made some observations about my stuttering that I would like to share with you. These insights have given me hope of finding a way out.

One of these observations came to me just the other night. I was at a local jazz club with a good friend of mine. Before the band had a chance to start playing, my friend and I engaged in some conversation. My stuttering mentality was in full force. I blocked throughout our conversation, hesi-

tated initiating conversation most of the time, and avoided certain words as well.

Then something happened. The band started playing very loud. Now I had to yell at the top of my lungs to be heard by my friend. But I was totally fluent! I even initiated some topics of discussion, and I can't even remember avoiding any words. Then the music stopped, and I was back to blocking again.

I couldn't help but think to myself, "Why did I go back to stuttering without the loud music playing?"

The answer was obvious: I was holding back.

I couldn't hold back when the music was loud because my friend would have trouble understanding me with my stuttering over the loud music. So I let loose and shouted at the top of my lungs in order to be understood. The stuttering mentality took a back seat. I was fluent.

But what was I holding back when the music wasn't playing and I was stuttering? What did I want to block out of my consciousness? What was I afraid of saying? How was I afraid of coming across to my friend? I didn't have any ready answers.

Another observation I made occurred over the past month. Because of my religious background we engage in fasting. Fasting involves eating before sunrise and after sunset, but not partaking of food or drink between those times. As you can imagine, this is a powerful exercise that can really test your discipline of mind over body.

The first several days of the fast take some getting used to. By noon your body is crying out for nourishment and water. But you have to learn to let go of those thoughts and not allow your body to control your mind.

Something interesting happened to me during those first several days. I became naturally fluent in many situations that I would have stuttered in. What was going on here? How was this situation similar to the jazz club scenario?

What I observed was that my mind was so focused on my fundamental needs of hunger and thirst that I forgot about the stuttering. All I could think of was "When am I going to eat. Boy, am I thirsty." I wasn't even thinking about being a person who stutters!

Then one afternoon during the fast a client of mine called and asked me to troubleshoot a computer problem. Before I arrived at their office, I found myself anticipating what would happen with the client. Though I was very thirsty and hungry, it had become a familiar feeling and no longer held my attention. This left my mind free to run scripts of the situation over and over again. I started to feel the familiar tension and stress that accompanies stuttering, and sure enough, when I spoke, I noticed that I was blocking again.

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We have had problems with this client and dealing with them face-to-face has always been a sticking point with me. Because they have a tendency to take advantage of their contract beyond what is allowed, my supervisor always instructs me to be firm in my dealings with them. So how have I traditionally dealt with stressful situations like this? I anticipate what might happen. I try to hold my ground, take control and get the upper-hand. This means I have to come across as powerful and confident.

But what if I go too far, and they terminate their contract? I will be at fault. I may get fired. So what do I do? You guessed it: I hold back. And the way I learned to do that was with stuttering and blocking.

Through these observations, I realized something about the basic building block from which the stuttering mentality feeds. I use my speech blocks to mask out feelings that I don't think will be appropriate or that I don't want to experience. I have found this to be a recurring pattern. By contrast, when I am just living in the moment, these questions don't come up at all, and I am naturally fluent. The stuttering mentality is gone.

These are the kinds of observations I've been making about my stuttering that I've found to be useful. Perhaps you may want to ask yourself the same kinds of questions. Don't worry if you can't find an answer immediately. Just keep asking. Over time, you'll notice that the same patterns come up again and again. When you start seeing the patterns, that is when you can start making changes.

## MY TWO MODES OF STAMMERING

by David Creek, Ph.D.

*At the time he wrote this, David Creek was a physicist living in England and writing a book on stammering which he hoped to finish some time after his retirement. This piece was abstracted from a longer article that appeared in the British Stammering Association's quarterly newsletter Speaking Out.*

An anticipated block starts life with me scanning ahead and latching onto a word. This word might already be a feared word, but if it is not it soon becomes a feared word as it draws closer. A short time before I attempt to say it, I know that I will block. I found the physical processes start with a nasty feeling inside, in the pit of my stomach, a feeling of déjà vu, "Oh dear, here we go again, another block." Going through the actions in slow motion, this feeling is violent and very nasty.

Then I became aware of a small but very definite tension high in my throat I was unable to localize it precisely but it was certainly in the region of the larynx. Was it locking of the vocal cords? Probably not because I could

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breathe in and out with the tension still there. When I tried to say my name, this small tension rapidly grew into a much larger tension involving my whole tongue and other parts of my throat. I had obviously flipped into a full-scale block. What I was doing was expanded in time. In normal circumstances everything would have happened so quickly that the onset of a block would have seemed instantaneous and beyond comprehension why I was suddenly behaving in this curious way.

A bit later during my experimental phone calls, I decided to try and relax out of the small tension in my throat. The first time it took considerable concentration and many seconds: I breathed in and out three times. Eventually I felt the tension evaporate, my throat was free. I tried to say my name and was astonished when the words, "David Creek," popped out with complete fluency. I was astonished because I still had the nasty feeding in the pit of my stomach signaling a block. I was expecting to block and gearing up my mind, my whole body, to deal with the unpleasant experience. Total fluency was an amazing result.

Further tests indicated the simple rule that, with tension in my throat I would block, without tension I was fluent. I felt I had the beginnings of an answer to my throat-blocking problem. Fluent people do not go around tensing the wrong muscles in their throats. If I really want to attain fluency I have to unlearn my bad habit and teach myself to stay relaxed.

However, this is not the whole story. While all this was going on, I was becoming increasingly aware that in stressful situations my breathing was apt to become erratic and irregular. I could not make sense of it at first but then it struck me in a flash. This erratic breathing was a product of fear, pure panic reaction. My particular foible was a perceived fear of authority figures. When I had to ask for information from someone who knew more than I did, when I was being questioned or thought I was the underdog, I was literally quaking with fear. When fear was dominant, my breathing, my diaphragm, went out of control and the quality of my speech took a very dramatic downturn.

This was illustrated over a weekend when I went to visit relatives, for me not the most stressful of situations. I spoke very fluently, managing to control my anticipated blocks using pausing and throat relaxation. The next day back at work I went to see my boss, a pleasant and relaxed fellow. Just before I started to speak, I was overwhelmed by this panic breathing. I was almost hyperventilating. I stammered catastrophically for about half a minute until I got it under control. Occasionally I have found that the level of fear can be so great that an enormously long pause, saying absolutely nothing, is the only way towards a calmer state.

Nowadays I find on average that this erratic breathing only occurs about once or twice a day in higher stress situations, often when speaking to

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strangers. As such, it is susceptible to reason. When I find my breathing going out of control, I suggest to myself that it is not really stressful but a perfectly normal speaking situation. I am sure that in the past, erratic breathing due to fear was a much more frequent occurrence and contributed to lack of success with “block modification,” “passive airflow,” and other techniques

My most frequent problem remains the throat block which seems to be caused by the fear of individual words. Blocks can occur every few seconds. They are independent of the diaphragm in the sense that I can remain breathing perfectly regularly and yet have problems in the throat. I tend to deal with them by a series of mini pauses during which I rapidly relax. The end result might sound like hesitant speech, or if I am holding back, whereas in fact I am pausing and relaxing.

What I have said will not be applicable to all stammerers. Some are avoiders, some do not anticipate, and some do not block in the same way as I do. However, I feel that there is a vast body of stammerers out there who do behave in a similar manner to myself.

#### **OBSERVATIONS DAY TO DAY**

**By Andrew James Rees**

*These are selections from an Internet correspondence between myself and Andrew Rees who at the time was twenty-four, living in Wales, and studying sociology and psychology at the University of Swansea. Andrew notes that “I have stammered for as long as I can remember but until I was sixteen, I just had occasional blocks. Then my stammering became more severe. Today, the power of observation has given me a totally new perspective on stammering. I no longer see what I do as stammering, and this has enabled me perceive myself and the world in a totally new and refreshing light.”*

#### **4 March 1999**

I did a presentation to my seminar class recently. As a result, I felt nervous. Initially, I really stammered even though I tried to slide through the blocks, but after a while, I began to notice my shallow breaths. I didn’t try to control the perceived reality. I tried to have fun with the blocks. Then I began to stop being afraid. I tried to stay in touch with how I felt. On this occasion I didn’t get to the stage where I was fully immersed in what I was reading, but that will come. I didn’t feel any regret or self hate. I felt integrity for myself, nothing but respect, true grit, and character. I was proud of myself.

Recently I have been stopping strangers in the street, just to practice asking questions. What I have found has really opened my eyes. When I

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concentrated just on trying to get the words out, I struggled and fought. But when I focused on connecting with the other person and held a positive feeling in my mind about the emotional connection, the words just seemed to tumble out with no fuss or bother.

When I get the feeling that I'm going to stammer, I try not to identify with the panic. I just accept it's there, but I now know that I have a choice to go with it or not. Instead of focusing on my speech, I try to look at what I wanted to block out. I can see now that it's about wanting to block something out, and it's a marvelous realization.

#### **6 April 1999**

Over the weekend I took a telephone call from my girlfriend who is in Milan. I did feel the old control and anticipation thoughts entering my mind. Then I did something interesting. I asked myself how I really wanted to respond to what she was saying, not what I thought she wanted to hear, or what I should say so I wouldn't stammer. This was a major breakthrough because I just spoke. I asked myself how I felt and spoke my mind for the first time in *years* with no hint of holding back.

It was like I had learned how to surf the waves rather than continually falling into the sea and getting caught. I did have blocks, but here is the interesting thing. I didn't really pay much attention to them. I was too interested in representing my own thoughts and feelings. For the first time in ages, what I wanted to say was more important than how I said it. When I did stammer I quickly got back on my surf board and caught the next wave rather than waiting in anticipation for the next block and letting it beat me under the ocean. I can't tell you how good it felt. I feel like I have an even better picture of the total feeling of letting go.

#### **28 April 1999**

Had a job interview today, and it's fair to say that I blocked my feelings throughout. My speech was very disrupted. After the interview it was hard not to feel some embarrassment and sadness.

However, I remained positive like I always do and tried to learn from the experience. It's fair to say that I cocooned myself throughout the whole interview and slipped back to my familiar attempts to block my feelings. I wasn't aware that I was even having feelings. I looked back and thought wow, what happened? The fact that I know that I caused it is comforting because in the past I thought it was due to sorcery or a demonic force.

#### **30 April 1999**

The weeks before the interview, I don't know why, but I was not in touch with myself and almost felt neutral, neither alive nor dead. It strikes me now

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that why I felt like this was because I had been holding myself back for a number of weeks before the interview and that hindered the way I spoke in the interview. This is why my inner harmony was disrupted. It was just an external manifestation of what was going on internally.

I always wondered what “holding back” meant. In my experience it means not allowing yourself to feel negative feelings. By not allowing yourself to experience these negative feelings, you cannot open up to the corresponding highs. I think this is becoming a lot clearer to me. Most of the blocking which occurs during speech is the result of nonverbal inner inabilities to flow with how one feels. This is, I feel, part of the reason why I blocked persistently during the interview.

Interviews are also challenging because you have to play a role, and this can be challenging for someone who needs to get in touch with how he feels. The role can almost mask what the person feels, unless the feelings at the moment of the interview are acceptable to projecting a favourable image of oneself.

Two nights ago I felt down, and this stayed with me all day. Everything I saw, I saw through the glasses of someone who was down. It occurred to me, however, that I wasn’t down; I was holding back from feeling what was going on. I was on the water’s edge, afraid to jump into the cold water, afraid of the initial shock of the icy water. If, however, I just jumped in, the shock would hit but would diminish as my body got used to temperature. In the evening I suddenly realized what I was doing and let myself feel what I was holding back. I got onto a bus, and the way I spoke mirrored how I felt, and this was okay. After about half an hour of really getting down with the negative feelings, my head felt clear, and I felt good.

#### **9 June 1999**

I went into a shop to sell a piece of equipment. I didn’t even think about stammering. I was too busy trying to connect with the person. He seemed a nice chap, and I wanted to get friendly with him. Then he told me that he had been verbally abused by two shoplifters and that he had threatened them with violence. I didn’t want to get on the wrong side of this guy in case he threatened me. I tried to become invisible. I didn’t want to annoy him. I tried to be a *good boy*. This caused me to hold back.

Sunday I watched a sad movie, I knew it was sad because I had seen it before. Events have occurred in my life recently, and I have tried to let myself experience the feelings that they have invoked. I watched the movie and used it to feel the negative feelings that I’d been carrying around with me as a consequence of the events (I broke up with my girlfriend). I cried and really let go. Experiencing the feelings hurt. I could feel something in the pit of my stomach, but I stayed with it. Recently I have been discussing what

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has been happening to me with my parents, I told them that I hadn't cried for years, nor had I really laughed for the same duration.

After a recent conversation with my mother I wondered how I was totally fluent with her for an hour and then I began to hold back. "Why?" I wondered. I traced the conversation back and found out that I wanted to not think about a carpet fitter who my mother briefly suggested, could come down to my flat to fit a carpet. This was only briefly mentioned. I know the fitter and have negative feelings, not toward him, but toward his son. I tried to block these feelings out and this led to me holding back for two hours until my mother left. I could not process what was being said with clarity, I wasn't letting myself flow. What I feel I have learned is that I can have an acute reaction to something which I'm not consciously aware of and this can lead to holding back for days and sometimes even weeks and beyond.

#### **ANATOMY OF A BLOCK**

**by John C. Harrison**

One day back in the spring of 1982 I walked into a camera shop on 24th street near where I live in San Francisco to pick up some prints. The clerk, a pretty young girl, was at the other end of the counter, and when I came in, she strolled over to wait on me.

"What's your name?" she asked.

That question used to throw me into a panic, because I always blocked on my name. Always. But by 1982 stuttering was no longer an issue. Never thought about it. I liked talking to people, and never worried about speech, because my blocks had all but disappeared.

I started to say "Harrison", and suddenly found myself in a panic; I was locked up and totally blocked. All the old, familiar feelings had come back. I could feel my heart pounding. So I stopped, took a breath, allowed myself to settle down, and while the woman stared at me, collected myself enough to say "Harrison."

I walked out of the store with my prints, feeling frazzled and totally mystified. Where in the world had that block come from? Why had I suddenly fallen into the old pattern? Stuttering was the furthest thing from my mind when I walked in. I never thought about stuttering any more, because it never happened, so I knew it wasn't a fear of stuttering that caused me to block. At that point I did what I had always done in previous years when stuttering was a problem. I began playing the event over and over in my mind, trying to notice as much detail as possible to see if I could spot any clues, something that would explain what was going on.

"Where was the woman when I walked in?" I asked myself.

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Let's see. I pictured the layout of the store. I had come in and stood at the cash register. The woman was at the other end of the counter talking to someone.

"Who was the other person? Anything significant in that?"

It was a guy.

"And what did he look like?"

Hmmmm. Oh yeah, he was a biker. Tough looking. Had tattoos on his arms and was wearing a Levi's vest.

"What else did you notice?"

Well, the two of them seemed to like talking to each other. The guy appeared very much taken with the girl.

"How did he seem to you?"

Scary looking. Reminded me of the tough guys on the block when I was a kid. I remember those guys. They lived in the next town. They all had mean looking eyes, and they petrified me.

"How did you respond to people like him when you were a kid?"

Well, if I were on the street when several tough guys passed by, I would make myself invisible so they couldn't see me and hassle me. I'd suck all my energy in. I'd blend into the background. I'd look like a tree, or a bush, or a brick wall. No energy would radiate from me until they had passed. Nothing.

"Did you have any other feelings or observations about the biker in the store?"

I guess I felt like I'd interrupted an important conversation, because the two of them were getting on so well together.

"How did that make you feel?"

I reviewed the scene once more, trying to recall how I felt. How *did* I feel? I really concentrated, and a malaise swept across me. Then it became clear. I was worried that he'd be irked because the girl had left him to wait on me.

"So what was your response in such situations when you were a kid?"

I'd hold back. I didn't want to stand out. I didn't want to seem too strong or too assertive.

"Because...."

Because it would put me in danger. The guy might give me trouble, so I didn't want him to "see" me.

"So in the camera store you...."

Right. I slipped back into the old program. I held back. Blocked my energy. I tried to make myself invisible, just like in the old days.

I had no sooner come to realize this than all the muscles in my neck and shoulders relaxed, all the muscles that had tightened during the moment of panic in the photo shop.

I know what you're thinking: that I was just trying explain away what

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had happened. But that is not my experience. Through the years I've noticed that when I come upon a real truth, I have a physical reaction...a release. It's happened enough times so I've learned to recognize the signs.

Today, there's no doubt that I had stumbled on the answer.

This brief experience taught me something. I used to think that I stuttered because I was afraid I was going to stutter. I thought that everything revolved around my fear of being blocked, and how people might react. That was undoubtedly true in many cases. But not always. And certainly not in this instance when stuttering was furthest from my mind.

I had an art teacher once who gave me an excellent piece of advice. I was taking a drawing class and was having trouble sketching the model who was standing with her arms on her hips. I just couldn't get the arms to look right. The teacher came over, watched me for a few minutes and then said, "Look at the spaces."

"Huh?"

"Look at the spaces. Instead of focusing all your attention on the outline of the arms, look at the spaces around the arms. Notice the empty space in the middle that's created when the model puts her hand on her hip. Study the shape of that space. Then draw it."

I noticed it. I drew it. And the drawing came magically together.

You can learn to do this around stuttering by looking at the spaces. Look at the experiences around the speech block, not just at the stuttering, itself. See if you can tell what's going on. What do you notice? What are you thinking and feeling? What are your expectations, perceptions and beliefs? Many of the answers to the speech block are hidden there. If you keep your mind open and don't allow yourself to obsessively focus only on your speech, you will begin to discover many interesting and useful things.

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## ARE YOU OR ARE YOU NOT A STUTTERER?

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I am going to confess to you a secret that I've never shared before. Something that even my best friends have never known about me.

I'm a thief.

You heard right. A thief. An honest-to-god, we-gotcha-red-handed-you're-gonna-have-to-make-full-restitution thief. I was caught dead to rights.

Now that I've confessed to being a thief, how does that affect you. Would you hide the good silver if I came to dinner?

You would?

I'm not surprised. Hanging a label on someone sets up expectations and causes a person to be seen in a particular way. For example, imagine walking into the local bar of a small rural town in the deep south and announcing to all the hard drinkers that you're a Yankee.

"Hey, lookit what we got here. We got us a Yankee!" somebody shouts as everyone turns around to stare at you.

Might make you a mite uncomfortable, having those less-than-friendly eyes directed your way. You might be as saintly as Mother Teresa or as popular as Michael Jordan. But "Yankee" conjures up feelings for anybody still reliving the Civil War. Those individuals know who you *really* are. "Yankee" says it all.

### *LABELS SHAPE HOW PEOPLE SEE US*

Labels are potent shapers of perception. Not only do they cause you *not* to see what's there, they also lead you to see what's *not* there. For example, if someone told you that I were a stutterer, and I made an hour speech and over the course of the presentation never once stumbled, blocked or repeated, where would your attention be?

Where, indeed!

You'd be waiting for the other shoe to fall. You'd be waiting for me to stutter. Your awareness would be on something that was *supposed* to be there but wasn't.

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You might also unconsciously assign to me thoughts and feelings that I didn't have—fears, perfectionism, obsessive focus on performance, etc.—because that's what a "stutterer" is supposed to think and feel. You'd turn me into something that I wasn't.

Labels also establish a frame of reference. Several years ago I was reading the *San Francisco Chronicle* when I saw an article about two defensive linemen on the local Forty-niner football team who also happened to be medical doctors. I remember how confused I felt. Based on years of watching instant replays, my conception of a defensive lineman is that of a large, raging hulk who wishes to do bodily harm to members of the opposing team. On the other hand, a medical doctor is a healer, someone who supports the health and well-being of others.

I couldn't fit those two concepts together. It just didn't play.

So I started paying attention to the label "defensive linemen" and how it was affecting me. "Suppose I had read about two doctors who were also defensive linemen," I asked myself. "Would that cause me to perceive these players differently?" It would. Somehow, a medical doctor who likes vent to his aggressions was more palatable than a defensive lineman who wanted to heal people.

Same guys, different labels.

## *TO BE OR NOT TO BE*

When you label someone, when you say that someone "is" a particular thing, you end up placing that person into a category. Categories are important, especially in the sciences where it is necessary to organize and analyze a vast amount of natural phenomena. For example, as any biologist can tell you, being able to categorize an animal within a particular phylum or classification allows you to make certain assumptions about the salient characteristics of the animal and how it will behave. The problem is that when you apply that same methodology to dealing with humans, you can easily make assumptions about them that aren't true.

For example, would you consider Roger Federer a tennis player? Of course. From the time he was a kid, Federer lived and breathed tennis. As a player on the pro tour he made millions. Even now, it's hard to hear his name without conjuring up the gritty determination and the exuberant play that have been his trademark. Roger Federer *is* a tennis player, right down to the very soles of his Adidas. He sees the world through tennis-tinted glasses.

Now let's say someone named Roger Camden decides to take up tennis. He goes down to the local sport shop, buys new sneakers and a complete tennis outfit, a brand new Prince racquet and enough tennis balls to last a

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lifetime. Then he signs up for tennis lessons, and over a year of three-set weekends, he becomes pretty good.

Is Roger Camden a tennis player?

You could call him that. But he's not a tennis player in the same sense that Jimmy Federer is. Tennis is not his life. He doesn't think and breathe tennis. He's simply a guy who plays tennis. So if you assume that the two Rogers share the same perspective on life because they're both tennis players, you might be getting yourself in trouble. Same category; two different people.

When you assign someone a label—thief, Yankee, defensive lineman, doctor, tennis player, stutterer—you're making a statement about who that person *is* and what you can expect from him.

There's a story that vividly illustrates how labeling leads to suppositions that can border on the absurd. It seems that during a symphony concert a member of the audience found himself swept away by the sensitive and fluid performance of an accomplished violinist. Unable to contain himself, he nudged his companion and whispered, "He plays beautifully, doesn't he,"

"He does," said his friend. "Especially for a stutterer."

But it's when you start putting yourself in a box that the effects can be especially pernicious. By taking on the label "stutterer," you can easily end up isolating yourself from others because you're "different". Rather than looking for points of identification with other people, you end up focusing only on what separates you. You can also find yourself limiting your career choices, the people you choose to share your life with and/or the level of success you dare hope to achieve. "Oh, a stutterer couldn't do THAT!" you think.

On the other hand, if you're gradually able to drop the label and see yourself as a *person* who stutters, you won't be as likely to blind yourself to other possibilities. You can more easily avoid falling into the "allness" trap that labels engender and remain more receptive to the full range of opportunities that life presents.

Yet, giving up the term "stutterer" is tough for most people. Some of the more familiar arguments sound like this:

- *Well, you're just afraid to admit what you are.*
  - *"Person who stutters" is just too cumbersome.*
  - *I've always used the word "stutterer."*
  - *You're just running from yourself.*
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There's no question that "person who stutters" is a more cumbersome term. It's always easier to label someone a thief, failure, cripple, hippie, commie, Yankee, Republican, jock, chauvinist, women's libber, stutterer, or whatever convenient term comes to mind. Putting people in boxes is attractive, because you don't have to think very hard. But in doing so, you often end up seeing reality through tinted glasses.

### *BE WHAT YOU ARE*

There is, however, a time when it is important to be a stutterer. This is when a person secretly believes himself to be a stutterer but is living in denial of it. The thought process might go something like this:

*Who me? A stutterer? I'm not a stutterer. Okay, so I may hesitate from time to time, and maybe I do repeat or substitute words. But I'm not different from other people. No way! I'm just like everybody else. Me? A stutterer? NEVER!*

The more he denies it, the more he reinforces the idea that his secret fear is true. This is what happened to me. When my father suggested that I stuttered, I emphatically insisted it wasn't so. I absolutely hated the "s" word. "I don't stutter," I whined, "I hesitate." — even though the blocks regularly interfered with my flow of speech. In those days I was very much in denial, which is why I was so stuck.

To understand why being in denial locks you in place, try a simple experiment. Stand facing the wall about an inch or so away, close your eyes, and while you're standing there, tell yourself that you're actually standing in front of an open door.

*I'm not standing in front of a blank wall. That would make me really stupid if I were doing that. No, no. I'm really standing in front of an open door. Except for some reason, every time I go to walk through the doorway, I can't do it. Something mysterious is blocking me. I don't know why I can't move forward. (Must be a genetic flaw that's holding me back!) I KNOW that I'm standing on front of an open door. But WHY can't I move through it?*

Obviously, to move forward, you must first accept where you are. If you want to walk through the doorway, you have to first accept that you're not standing in front of the door. If you're reluctant to own up to where you are, you can't take that next step and your forward motion comes

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grindingly to a halt.

I'm not suggesting that you need to label yourself as a stutterer, or that it's even appropriate to do so. But I do suggest that in this instance you're reluctant to recognize that you've *already* cast yourself as a stutterer. And until you recognize and accept this fact, you'll be unable to give up the emotions, perceptions, beliefs or hidden games that are attached to it. You'll be subject to the universal law that "I am what I resist."

Does this imply that the word "stutterer" should never be used? Realistically, I know that old habits die hard and that the word is going to be around. "Stutterer" does trip off the tongue a lot easier than "person who stutters," and I'll even cop to using "stutterer" from time to time in writing to the professional community and in other presentation situations. But in talking to or about an individual, I make an effort to never inadvertently trigger a person's self-imposed limitations by putting them in a box that has a label attached to it. In these instances, I always use "person who stutters."

So my advice is this: use "stutterer" if you have to, but remain aware that "stutterer" is a label that can shape your perception if you let it. If you can keep this mind, then the word will have less opportunity to bias the way you see.

### *HARRISON CONFESSES ALL*

Before I conclude, you're probably curious about the confession that started this essay. Am I a thief?

Okay, here's the story.

When I was eight years old I unabashedly robbed my cousin Pat's piggy bank of 24 pennies. On the way home in our old black Ford coupe, I felt so guilty about what I had done that I ended up confessing the heinous deed to my mom. Fortunately, my mom was understanding, and although she gave me a stern lecture on the virtues of honesty and made me give back the money, the episode never colored my self-image.

Because there was one thing my mom never did.

She never called me a thief.

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## HOW TO GET RID OF STUTTERING IN UNDER 60 SECONDS

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*The subject of this essay has been previously discussed but not developed to the degree it is here. A version of this article appeared in the "Journal of Fluency Disorders." By the way, after you finish reading this I'd like to invite you over to my house for a dinner. We're going to barbecue a cat. What's that you say? How can I do such a thing? What's the problem? We're going to eat catfish. What did you think I meant?*

This is not what you think it is. It's not an article about a quick cure for stuttering. It's something a lot more realistic, something that really works. But before I tell you what I'm talking about, I'd like you to read two quotations that appeared in print over the last year. The first is from an article that originally ran in the *AFS Newsletter*, published by Britain's Association for Stammerers.

*The child's capacities for fluency develop with growth, but the demands for fluency placed on children by their listeners and by themselves are also increasing. When these demands exceed the child's capacities, stuttering occurs. If subsequently the child's capacities develop rapidly enough, or if the demands for fluency increase slowly or not at all, the stuttering will spontaneously remit. If demands continue to outpace capacities, stuttering will continue.*

The article is chock full of good observations and is typical of the many useful and sensible pieces that have appeared on the early development of stuttering. However, the excerpt above contains a statement that is not really true. Can you find it?

Now take a look at this next excerpt from material I received in the mail on the National Council on Stuttering.

*(Stuttering) is a complex set of behaviors that interfere with the kind of normal, fluent speech most people take for granted.... Many small children stutter when they're learning to talk. Most outgrow it, but for some the problem continues into adulthood and becomes chronic.*

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More excellent information in which a similar untruth lies buried. In both cases the fiction is in the presumption that stuttering in adults is a carryover of the same problem from childhood (inherent in the phrase “stuttering will continue into adulthood.”) I propose that this is totally misleading.

In the next several pages I want to bring your attention to an issue that isn’t addressed very much, if at all. I’m referring to the language of stuttering. My premise is that the word “stuttering” is so woefully deficient that it blinds us to key differences, forces us to see and believe basic untruths and keeps us locked in a box from which few are able to escape.

I feel particularly qualified to comment on this because for approximately 30 years I dealt with a chronic stuttering problem. Today and for the last 40 years stuttering has no longer been present, nor an issue, in my life. My recovery could not have taken place without the perceptual shifts that I’m going to describe.

I also want to show you a way to break out of this box.

## *LANGUAGE AFFECTS HOW WE PERCEIVE*

A while back I heard a presentation about a unique language developed in the barrios of Los Angeles, a language spoken by the tough kids of the Mexican ghetto. The presenter’s thesis was that the preponderance of angry words and the total absence of words describing softer feelings literally forced these kids into a violent view of the world as long as they communicated in this language.

The idea of language shaping perception is hardly new. The discipline of general semantics addresses these very issues, and Wendell Johnson explained these ideas with inordinate clarity in his book *People in Quandaries*.

One of the implications in general semantics is that it is difficult to perceive, and therefore address, what you don’t have a name for. Here’s an example. You’re at Squaw Valley on a skiing weekend. It’s early morning, and you’re about to wax your skis in preparation for a day on the slopes. Unless you know that there are different types of snow such as powder and corn snow, you may not wax your skis properly. Having the labels “powder” and “corn snow” allows you to perceive differences that you might not have noticed otherwise.

Here’s another hypothetical example. Say we become involved in a spirited discussion on whether sex is acceptable before marriage, but in our particular culture we do not have any words that describe the various degrees of sexual activity: kissing, petting, sexual intercourse and so on. Can you see how the conversation would become confused? When deficiencies

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in the language force us to equate kissing with sexual intercourse, we are forced to overlook significant degrees of sexual involvement. These deficiencies limit our ability to discuss (and perhaps agree on) the issues at hand, because we have no words to describe the issues at hand. All we can address is the simple dichotomy: should we or shouldn't we.

This issue applies to stuttering. You and I have been sold the idea that "stuttering" begins in childhood and persists into adulthood. This is simply untrue. The disfluencies that first appear in childhood and later disappear almost always of their own accord are different from the dysfluencies which persist into adulthood. One is not a continuation of the other. They are separate phenomena entirely. We are forced to see them as related only because we are stuck with one word to describe them — stuttering. When the writer of the second quotation in speaking of stuttering says that "most outgrow it, but for some the problem continues into adulthood and becomes chronic," he is forcing us to assume that the problems are intrinsically the same.

Is one an outgrowth of the other? Yes.

But they are not similar at all. The truth is, they don't even fall into the same category. One is an emotionally and (undoubtedly) genetically driven phenomenon. The other is a strategy, a learned behavior that we developed in our effort to deal with the first problem.

How, then, can we get around the confusion created by the word "stuttering?"

The solution doesn't take 60 seconds. It doesn't even take six seconds. The solution is to use two different words to describe these two phenomena.

The problem is, prior to 1985, there was only one word in use: stuttering. But that didn't stop us. We did what countless individuals have done before us when faced with a similar situation.

We coined a new word.

And just wait 'til you see how the problem began to clarify when we did.

## *WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE'RE DISCOMBOBULATED?*

Some years ago I was watching a discussion program on Cable News Network. The moderator was Daniel Schorr, a veteran newsman whom I knew in the 60's when I worked as a "gofer" on a show called "U.N. in Action." At one point in the discussion, while Schorr was struggling with his thoughts, he lapsed into the longest stretch of disfluency I've ever heard on the media. "Um, um, um, um, err, err, err..." He went on and on for what must have been six or eight seconds until he got his ideas straightened out.

Now what caused that? Schorr is a reasonably fluent person. What was

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going on that caused him to become almost incoherent for a period of time. It doesn't take a Ph.D. to come up with an answer. Schorr became discombobulated, and it interfered with his ability to express himself.

*Webster's Ninth New World Dictionary* describes "discombobulation" as the state of being upset or confused. This state affects people in different ways. Some people never seem to lose their cool. Put them in the middle of an earthquake, introduce them to the President of the United States, or surprise them with their clothes off, and they always seem to remain unflustered. Their thoughts line up like dominoes and the words come out without repetition or pauses.

Other people are different. Unexpectedly ask them to offer a toast to the bride and groom, and they hoist the champagne glass and then proceed to verbally fall all over themselves. Their toast is punctuated with umms and ahhs and may never follow a coherent train of thought.

Why does this happen? In part it's genetic. Some people have a sympathetic nervous system that overreacts to stimulation and goes into instant overload at the slightest provocation. These individuals slip into a sudden "flight or fight" syndrome, complete with high levels of adrenaline and other stress-producing hormones. Young children, especially, are particularly vulnerable to unusual stresses as they simultaneously wrestle with intellectual, emotional and physical growth and the demands and pressures of an unfamiliar environment. And these stresses show up in their speech.

Verbal development also varies. Certain children take longer to master the demands of speech. However, the associated disfluencies are generally not self-perpetuating and disappear as the child matures. They arise again only when stresses exceed manageable levels.

This easy disfluency is what people generally have in mind when they say (trying to be sympathetic), "Oh I stutter, too, when I get upset" — but you know they're not experiencing the speech blocks that can leave your day in a shambles. They're experiencing something else.

Since being discombobulated plays a large role in this kind of disfluency, let's give this brand of disfluency its own name.

We'll call it *bobulating*.

*BOB-U-LATE* v: 1: to produce speech repetitions in an easy, effortless manner characterized by lack of self-consciousness, fear and embarrassment — *BO-BU-LA-TION* n

Let's see what we gain by having created a separate word to describe this behavior. You've just come through a particularly hard block, and your listener, trying to offer support, gives you that famous line, "Listen, don't worry about it. When I don't have my thoughts in order, I stutter, too."

"No, no," you say. "It's not quite the same. You were bobulating."

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Now he realizes there's a difference, because you've used a word that describes what he's doing, and it's different from what you were doing.

"But then," he asks, if I was bobulating, what were you doing?"

"I was doing was something else," you respond. "I was\_\_\_\_\_." What?

You could say "stuttering," but that would just lead to more confusion since it's a word that already has so many confusing meanings and associations. We need another word. A word that is different from bobulating. A word that describes the struggles and blocked speech of someone who is experiencing all the feelings and behaviors that you and I are familiar with: panic, unconsciousness, embarrassment, fear, frustration, etc. These constitute a syndrome of feelings and behaviors that, over time, feeds on itself and becomes self-perpetuating as it grows into a full fledged performance fear.

So let's call this kind of behavior *blocking*.

*BLOCK v: 1: to speak in a manner characterized by struggle; to obstruct and constrict the vocalizing and breathing mechanisms 2: to create self-perpetuating speech disfluencies that generate fear, anxiety and self-consciousness and that frequently result in avoidance of specific words and specific speaking situations — BLOCK n*

Getting back to our friend, you explain to him, "No, what you were doing was not really the same. Your words were coming out in a stumbling, easy manner. You were bobulating. I do something different. My words sometimes come out in a halting manner because, for whatever reason, I learned to interfere with the speaking process. I was blocking. It may sound alike, but it's not." Now he can really perceive the difference, because each behavior is identified by a different word.

See how much clearer that is than trying to explain that his stuttering is not like your stuttering?

### *SIMILAR, YET VERY DIFFERENT*

It is also essential to have two different words because bobulating and blocking can look so confusingly alike. To give you an example—four-year-old Richie rushes up to his mom and blurts out, "Look, Mommy, I found a dan-dan-dan-dandelion." What's happening? He's excited, his emotions are stirred and he's wrestling with (for him) a new and complex word: dandelion. At the same time, he is totally unselfconscious about his speech. His focus is on communicating his discovery. In that moment his world is no less thrilling than it was for Thomas Edison when he finally discovered the secret to creating the electric light bulb.

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Compare that experience to this one. George is a young college freshman on a first date with Marsha, a pretty co-ed at his school. George is really taken by Marsha and feels at risk, since he's not sure that he can measure up to her expectations. After much hemming and hawing he's invited Marsha out for a picnic and is anxious to make a good impression. Now they're out in the meadow together. The blanket is spread out and the lunch that George thoughtfully and carefully prepared is beautifully laid out and ready. They're just about to settle down when George spies a particularly stunning dandelion. He stoops to pick it, then offers it to Marsha..

"Look, Marsha, at this gorgeous dan-dan-dan-dan-dandelion," he says with his heart pounding.

George has a fear of saying "dandelion." He manages to say "dan" okay, but there is a fear about completing the word. On the other hand, he has an even bigger fear about saying "dan" and then lapsing into a long embarrassing silence. So he keeps hammering away at the word, repeating "dan" over and over until he feels free enough to complete the word.

George's repetitions are motivated by entirely different dynamics than Richie's. Yet, they may sound exactly alike. For this reason it is absolutely essential to have different words to describe what each person is doing. Just saying they're stuttering creates confusion and covers over the real issues. One is an unselfconscious reflex prompted by a feeling of discombobulation, a struggle with verbal skills and maybe genetic factors of one sort or another. The other is a strategy, usually accompanied by a great deal of self-consciousness, to push through what is perceived as a difficult and threatening speech block.

Thus, if you say that Richie is bobulating and George is blocking (actually "stalling" which is a version of blocking where one repeats the previous word or syllable until one feels "ready" to say the feared syllable or word), you are able to immediately see significant differences. What's more, Richie's mom doesn't have to get all crazy because he's "stuttering." She knows the differences between bobulating and blocking and can more easily decide when it might be appropriate to take some kind of remedial action.

## ***THE POWER OF TWO WORDS***

It sounds like wishful thinking to imagine that two simple words can make a difference. But they can. They can make an enormous difference.

For example, it becomes a whole lot easier to resolve the issue of whether "stuttering" is due to genetic causes, because now we can look at what part of the stuttering process we're talking about. Are we referring to bobulating? Of course there are genetic factors involved. On the other

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hand, if we're speaking about the strategies we develop to break through a speech block, it becomes apparent that genetics does not play a role — no more than genetics would play a role in the strategies you adopt to get around a large boulder blocking a narrow mountain path.

Having two words would make it clearer to parents when their children have a problem that calls for consultation with a speech therapist.

It would help researchers to clarify what part of the stuttering phenomenon they want to investigate.

And it would help each of us to develop a clearer self-image and better sense of what we're doing when we're blocked.

In fact, expanding the language of stuttering is so critical to effecting change that I see no way for us to make any significant and lasting progress in stuttering therapy without it.

So why not take the 60-second cure and get rid of stuttering. In its stead—at least in your mind— substitute bobulate and block, or two words of your own choosing. And see if that, alone, doesn't make it much easier to understand and address the problems at hand.

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## HAVING FUN: IT'S MORE POWERFUL THAN YOU THINK

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Early April of my 12th year was a time of gnawing fear. Our seventh grade class was planning to present a scene from Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream," and I was assigned a minor role. I can't remember my exact part, but I do remember a particular line that's been engraved in my mind these 45 years.

The line was, "I came with Hermia hither."

My anticipation of delivering that line wrecked my life for a month. For the secret truth was that I stuttered, and one of the sounds I stuttered on was "h". Often as not, I would lock up on the "h" sound. Simply stop talking. And then to hide my embarrassment, I would pretend that I forgot what I was saying, or I'd substitute another word.

The problem was, I was stuck with Shakespeare's words. I couldn't substitute. So for three weeks I had nightmares of standing before the entire grammar school with the words "Hermia hither" stuck in my throat and the deafening silence of the auditorium pounding in my years.

I got through the performance, just barely, by rushing into "Hermia hither" with a kamikaze-like abandon reserved for skydivers on their first leap. My secret was safe. I had survived another speaking situation.

As you might gather, speaking was no fun for me as a kid. Nor is it for most people, young or old. A survey of the public's ten greatest fears places public speaking number one on the list with death trailing behind in the number three or four position.

I eventually got over the stuttering problem. But it wasn't simply because I worked on my speech. I also worked on my ability to have *fun* while I was speaking. That took the pressure off the performance, got me in touch with myself, and transformed the experience into something positive. I have since wondered why having fun is not universally recognized as one of the most powerful catalysts to change.

Fun is usually presented as the icing on the cake. That little misguided belief has created more havoc in my life, because what seems to be true is that having fun is not just the icing, *it's also the cake*; it's the wellspring of my strength, identity and creativity.

Right now I can imagine some harried mother saying, "For god's sake,

George, don't let the kids read this!" When your kids want to horse around at just the time they should be scrubbing in the tub or struggling with their homework, the very last thing you want them to hear is that fun is "the cake." After all, we *know* that fun is not serious. It's what goes on *after* the bath and the homework are done. It's recreation. It's...it's...well, it's FUN. Right?

We keep thinking about fun like we do about sugar. It tastes good in small doses, but in quantity, it'll wreck us.

Quite the contrary.

I have seen what the power of having fun can do.

### *THE LIBERATING POWER OF FUN*

A few years back at a chapter meeting of the National Stuttering Project we were taking turns making short talks, when eventually we got around to a diminutive lady named Lila. As Lila began her speech, she spoke in her typical voice, a flat, brittle voice punctuated by frequent blocks. It was also apparent that she was locked in her survival mode. You know, unsmiling, eyes staring into space, looking like she'd rather be doing anything else than standing there talking to us.

I thought maybe I could help her out and halfway through her presentation I took the liberty of interrupting her.

"Lila," I said, "are you having any fun?"

"No."

"How come?"

"I'm afraid you aren't g-g-g-going to l-l-like what I say."

That was easy to believe. Her whole manner said "Don't be mad at me. I'll be good. I'll do it right."

"Lila," I said. "Why don't you start over, but this time, speak the way you've always *wanted* to speak. Forget what *we* want; do what *you* want. Be dramatic. Be silly. Be outrageous. Whatever it is that turns you on. *Whatever* you do is fine with the rest of us."

Lila began again, her voice stronger but still tentative.

"Fantastic," I coached. "Now even more energy. Liven it up. Have some fun. We know you're a ham!"

Well, that touched a nerve. It turned out that Lila was a closet ham, and for the first time the world had not only recognized it but actually encouraged it. She didn't have to play the shy, retiring type.

Lila cut loose, and her energy, her whole demeanor changed. Within a few moments she was fooling around, and as her confidence grew, she came totally alive. But the most remarkable thing was that once she began to have fun, *Lila didn't stutter*.

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Now, we weren't speech therapists. We were only encouraging Lila to have fun, something she was evidently not willing to do for herself. Having fun liberated Lila's power; it set her free. And that, in turn, liberated her ability to express herself without holding back.

What became clear that evening was how deeply we can be affected by our willingness, or unwillingness, to have fun.

## HOW WE'RE PROGRAMMED

If you're like me, you were told a lot of things as a kid. You were told how to eat, dress, behave, grow up. And later, how to make money, raise kids and, if you read Hemingway in English 101, how to die with grace.

But not too many people enlightened me about fun. Oh, they told me *what* was supposed to be fun and what wasn't. But the *having* of fun was left up to me. Consequently, I learned about it on a catch-as-catch-can basis and developed some beliefs that may sound familiar.

**Belief #1—Work isn't fun.** My father cleared that up for me one summer's day while I was still in high school. I was making extra spending money typing envelopes at his office. It was a boring job, and I must have complained because he turned to me and said, "Work's not supposed to be fun. Work is WORK!"

Got it? Fun is what you do in the off-hours. Work is where you *struggle* and deal with *problems*. I heard about taxes, inefficient employees, missed deadlines; I heard about everything that went wrong. But very seldom did my father, or anyone else for that matter, ever tell me what they loved—or even liked—about their work. I still see that tendency in myself and in others; we talk about what's wrong, but don't put as much energy into talking about what's right.

**Belief #2—Fun is a reward for being good.** This is a spin-off of belief #1. It sounds like this:

"Do your homework, or you can't go out and play."

"Clean up your room, or I won't take you to the circus tomorrow."

To have fun I learned that you had to barter and be a certain kind of person. The currency was usually good behavior.

**Belief #3—Fun is always second to achievement.** I wouldn't say I had a particularly difficult childhood. But I do know that having fun was not a major emphasis in a middle-class upbringing. It certainly took a back seat to good grades and other visible signs of achievement.

Typical example: one afternoon I came back from the golf course having chosen not to play but practice instead. I had hit out three buckets of balls on the practice tee until my hands were red, and I really felt satisfied with my performance. I'd belted 'em a country mile. When I walked in the living

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room, my father looked up from the newspaper.

"How'd it go?" he asked.

"Good," I said.

"What did you shoot?"

"I didn't. I just hit balls."

"You should have played," my father said, his disappointment barely hidden. "You need to score to know how you're doing."

End of conversation.

Well, he was right there. Nobody ever shot an 82 on the practice tee. But on the other hand, it didn't seem that my having a good time counted for anything. In fairness to my father, I should say that his response was not much different from what any of my friend's fathers might have said. Maybe it was a characteristic of their generation, but I never heard adults put pleasure on a par with achievement.

**Belief #4—Other people know what is fun for you.** God knows they are persistent in telling you. When you're a kid, the adult world is full of helpful suggestions:

"Go outside and play baseball. It's fun." (I hated baseball. They always stuck me in center field, and I dropped every fly ball hit to me.)

"C'mon with us. You'll have fun at Aunt Jessie's." (Sitting around with a bunch of grown-ups was hardly inspiring to a 10-year-old.)

"Fun" is having to attend to the children's symphony at Carnegie Hall when you'd rather be out playing cowboys and Indians with the kids next door.

Such are the ways that attitudes are formed in childhood. And it doesn't really change when you get older. Want to know what constitutes fun? Just read *Playboy*, the travel brochures or watch the beer commercials on TV. The media is full of advice on the good life. So people flock to the Friday night bars looking for a good time. And they buy faster cars and take longer vacations and still deal with that nagging feeling that something is missing.

The truth is, fun is a process, a very personal process that involves not only *what* you're doing but how and why you're doing it. This story will elaborate.

Back in the Dark Ages when I was 25, I was living in New York City with some of my old high school buddies and bringing my laundry back to my parent's home on Long Island. You get the picture. One day, more or less on impulse, I made a plane reservation to San Francisco. Two weeks later, I was three thousand miles from home and on my own for the first time in my life.

It was a grand adventure. I located a place to live, found a good job and discovered what independence felt like.

One night I was in the middle of washing my socks, when I suddenly

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realized that this inane activity was actually fun. I couldn't believe it. For years I had resisted doing anything useful around the house. And now here I was up to my wrists in Tide, squishing socks in the sink and having a grand old time. Buddha had his great epiphany beneath a bo tree. I had my revelation in the Baker Acres Residence Club over a sink full of soapy socks. In that moment I understood that having fun is another way of saying "I'm doing what gives me the greatest sense of my own self worth."

All my life other people had washed my socks. Now I was on my own, looking after my own needs, and it felt terrific. The experience of fun helped to clarify what had been missing in my life: my own sense of independence. And it helped to set the direction for the years that followed. (Since then, having served its purpose, washing socks has sunk back to being a bore.)

## *FINDING YOUR DIRECTION*

Taking fun seriously can be extremely useful in establishing a career path. Some years ago I met a woman named Susan Hanan who was Director of Career Counseling for a major bank in Spokane, Washington. An outgoing woman in her late 30s, she had a keen appreciation for the need to do work that is pleasurable. As a career counsellor, she used the pleasure principle in guiding people toward a rewarding career.

"There are so many people who are unhappy with their jobs," she said. "And much of it stems from not working at things that give them pleasure. We've been taught to get an education, choose a career, and get a job. Bingo, just like that. But we're encouraged to do all this without paying attention to what we like, to what turns us on, to what is fun. So is it surprising that people in their thirties and older go through identity crises in their work?"

"When people are considering a career change, our workshop teaches a methodology that seems amazingly simple. We tell them to start at the bottom; namely, look at what you *like* to do. Get in touch with those activities that make you feel powerful, turned on, excited. Is it helping people, solving problems, managing others? Define it. Then look for people whose jobs involve these activities. Find out how they got where they are and what you need to know or do in order to get there yourself. It's just amazing how it works."

That's just arse-backwards from the way most of us were taught to choose careers. It puts status, money and doing what's "right" in the back seat behind enjoying your job.

"When you approach work this way," said Susan, "you may find that your present job, the one you thought you wanted to change, is ideal after all. To make it work for you, you may just need to expand it so it includes more of what you like to do."

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So fun turns out to be a kind of psychic compass. Even in foul weather, it can keep us pointed in the right direction by giving us a clear indication of what things are really important, not to other people, but to us *personally*. If you think about it, you'll probably agree that it's most often when you're having fun that you have the clearest sense of who you are. It's also when you do your best work.

On the other hand, when we lose our capacity for fun, we tend to drift, sometimes for a lifetime, or fall prey to someone whose clearer sense of direction and purpose we adopt for our own.

How do we rediscover what's fun for us? Here are some ideas:

***Begin noticing what's going on.*** The path to enlightenment, says the Zen master, is to observe without judgement. During the day, stay tuned into to what you're doing, feeling, thinking. It's not easy, but keep watching. You don't have to act on your observations at this point. Just keep noticing.

***Trust what you see.*** One of the things I learned from various personal growth trainings such as est and Lifespring is that I didn't often trust my own observations. I'd believe others before I'd believe myself. No wonder I had little self confidence or sense of what I liked.

***Examine your beliefs objectively.*** Beliefs are deceiving, because we tend not to see them as beliefs at all but simply as "the way things are," I'm reminded of the woman who goes to the psychiatrist with a problem.

"Tell me how you spend your day," the psychiatrist says.

"Well," replies the lady, "I get out of bed. I put on my slippers and robe, I go to the bathroom, I brush my teeth, I throw up, I..."

"You THROW UP?" exclaims the psychiatrist.

"Yes," says the lady. "Doesn't *everybody*?"

As this story illustrates, it is often hard to separate the real world from your perception of it. Many beliefs are so ingrained that it takes major "surgery" (like running off to San Francisco) to develop sufficient perspective.

Jaret Elbert, a San Francisco advertising copywriter and ex-New Yorker recalls some of her past beliefs about fun. She sees them as part of the culture.

"My society looked at fun the way it looked at eating chocolate chip cookies. There wasn't much nutritional value. You had to be good to get any. And if you got too much, you'd develop an upset stomach or break out."

"And," she adds, "it was a foregone conclusion that anyone who had lots of fun couldn't be very deep."

***Broaden your ideas about what's fun.*** Most people see fun as only recreational. But that's just *one definition*; there are others. I found it fun to

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do this article, though I bashed the word processor a few times, tore my hair (what's left of it) in frustration, and threw away most of what I'd written.

**See whether you've set limits on fun.** Frequently, people have an alarm clock that tells them just how much fun they are entitled to have at any one time. After ten minutes, ten hours or whatever—rinnnnnnnnng!— the alarm goes off and the fun comes to an end. If that's something you do, begin looking at why you don't deserve more fun than you give yourself.

Come to think of it, having fun isn't something you deserve, any more than you "deserve" two arms and two legs. It's simply a part of who you are; an important part. And it has a remarkable ability to heal, as author Norman Cousins reported in a book in which he described how he defied the doctors and cured a life-threatening illness by simply increasing his capacity for fun.

To have fun is to rediscover your unique self and to capitalize on your greatest strengths and resources.

So what, pray tell, are you waiting for?

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## OVERCOMING PERFORMANCE FEARS

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Several years ago I went jogging with a friend in Marin county north of San Francisco. It was a crisp, bright Sunday morning, and I was looking forward to the six mile jaunt around a public reservoir. As we got to the reservoir, we saw that the roadway was blocked to auto traffic by a chain stretched between two posts. My friend, Steve, who always likes a challenge, jumped over the chain. And I, the copycat, attempted to do the same.

What I hadn't counted on was that my legs had lost some of their resilience during the two miles it took to get to the reservoir. I found this out abruptly when in mid-jump my toe caught one of the links, and I tripped. I was more startled than hurt; my slightly skinned knee did not prevent me from continuing the run. But I left that day with some fears about jumping over chain fences.

Now let us advance time six months. I am running one afternoon around the San Francisco Marina, when it occurs to me that it might be fun to jog out past the yacht club to the tip of a promontory called Lighthouse Point. I take off on a route that leads me past the rows of moored yachts and power boats. At the end of the paved roadway the run leads me onto a dirt path. And there, stretched ominously across the path, is a single link chain.

My first instinct is to jump over it. Although the chain is high, it does not seem like it would tax my capabilities. And yet, a moment before I come to the chain, the memory of the earlier mishap rushes to my mind. I chicken out and run around the chain. On my return trip, I do the same.

That night I am bothered by having avoided the jump. It is not unlike the battles I fought in the past with stuttering. Although I used to chicken out many times at the last moment and start my sentences with "um" or "err", I always approached each speaking situation from the point of view that "this time I'm going to say the word without avoiding or substituting."

Now here I am again with a different problem but the same familiar feelings. I know that I'm going to make that run again, and I know that I *have* to jump over that chain.

The fears begin. I picture myself tripping and spraining an ankle, or worse. I see myself out at Lighthouse Point with a twisted foot and with nobody around to give me a lift back. Maybe I'd even get pneumonia in the

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chill evening air and die. (My mind easily lapses into melodrama over stuff like this.) As much as I tell myself I don't have to jump over the fence, the compulsion doesn't leave me alone. *I have to jump over it!*

Through the years I've learned a few things about how my mind functions, and I notice now that it's doing a familiar number on me. It was a book by a plastic surgeon named Maxwell Maltz that first helped me identify this number and at the same time gave me my first useful tool against speech blocks. In his book *Psycho-Cybernetics* (still in print and well worth reading) Maltz compares the workings of the mind to that of the modern computer.

Maltz points out that the most powerful part of the mind, the subconscious, is an impersonal, problem-solving computer that is set up to solve whatever problems the conscious mind puts before it. The conscious mind is the "programmer." It defines the problem and feeds it into the subconscious. The programming "language" used by the conscious mind is called "mental imagery."

To demonstrate his point, Maltz describes a golf instructor who taught golf in a very unique manner. In his first lesson the instructor would have the student sit comfortably in an easy chair. He would then demonstrate to his pupil how a golf swing should look; in fact, he'd demonstrate it over and over again until the student had a clear *picture* of the total motion. Then he'd say to his student, "practice this swing in your mind each evening for 10 minutes over the next month before we have our second lesson. Just sit comfortably and picture how you'd like to hit the ball."

Invariably, during the second lesson when the student would actually play a round of golf, he'd shoot in the mid-90s, an extraordinary score for a beginning golfer.

Why does this work?"

Maltz explains that imagined experience is essentially no different than real experience. It only differs in *intensity*. Basically, the body/mind can be trained through imagined experience as effectively as through an actual physical enactment.

All athletes who attain any level of proficiency will tell you that a good mental picture is essential to a good performance. Jack Nicklaus says he never hits a golf ball before first visualizing exactly how he wants the shot to go. In fact, have you ever watched a world class high jumper before he starts down the runway toward the bar? Sometimes you might catch him close his eyes for a moment. What he's doing is picturing what he wants his body to do; in effect, he's giving directions to his body. The clear, vivid picture he creates...a picture complete with emotions...is the program he's giving his subconscious "computer" to solve. He knows that without the proper picture, he'll never get his body to do what he wants it to.

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All this was exactly opposite to what I was doing with the chain fence. My fears were creating negative pictures, things I *didn't* want to happen. And yet, the more I thought about jumping over the chain, the more I continued to create these negative images over and over again...literally programming myself for failure.

Why was I doing this?

Why was I finding it so hard to stop?

## *OUR GENETIC PROGRAMMING*

To find the answer we have to move back in time to the days when prehistoric man roamed the earth. Like the other animals, man was programmed by nature for one essential task: survival. All his instincts, as well as his bodily functions, were set up to assure his survival in this harsh landscape. Today, although civilization has radically reconstructed our world, our bodies are still programmed for the simple task of survival.

If we're infected by a virus, antibodies rush in to destroy them.

If we're cut and bleeding, platelets staunch the flow of blood.

If we're threatened by attack, the body releases adrenaline and other chemicals to give us added energy so that we can exercise the same options available to prehistoric man — fight or flight.

Though there are tens of thousands of years that separate us from those prehistoric times, our minds and bodies are still governed by these basic evolutionary functions.

Let us look again at prehistoric man. He lived in perilous times. If he didn't pay attention to the ever present dangers, he could end up as lunch meat for any of the many marauding carnivores.

Consequently, his mind, like the minds of all animals, was designed to protect him from danger through the process of creating *mental pictures* of any potential threat. For example, if he were in tiger country, his mind would create visual imagery of threatening tigers. These images would keep him alert to the danger and discourage a fatal lapse of attention. For if the imagery were not there to keep him alert, he might be surprised...and eaten!

Our minds still function this way. When we're walking down a deserted metropolitan street at night, most of us are alert to the danger of muggers, because if we're not we could be surprised and relieved of our wallets, or worse.

Similarly, if the tree in the back yard is leaning too far over the house, our fears create a mental picture of a crushed-in roof that impels us to take remedial action before the tree falls. As you can see, then, our minds function in ways designed to perpetuate our survival.

But evolution didn't anticipate modern society. Specifically, it didn't

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anticipate a new and different kind of danger. A danger that relates, not to our physical survival, but to the survival of our ego in a *social* situation. Many of these fears revolve around tasks we have to perform. How will others judge us? Will they accept us? Or will we die from lack of love and acceptance? If we do perceive our performance in life or death terms, our body/mind will react as if we're confronted with a *physical* threat. It will force an image of the danger into our mind, so we can deal with it.

What are some of these threatening images? Here are a few common ones:

- *Introducing someone by the wrong name*
- *Hitting the wrong note during a piano recital*
- *Catching our foot on the high bar as you sail over*
- *Dripping paint onto the carpet*
- *Blocking on the word "big" as you're ordering a Big Mac.*

Each of these is another example of a performance fear.

Now, jumping over a 7'2" high bar is not a life or death situation in the *literal* sense. But suppose your track scholarship, or your national ranking, hung on that jump?

Giving a piano recital to your high school class or a verbal presentation to your boss does not have to be traumatic. But it might be if you cannot live without the approval of your classmates or your boss.

As far as our mind goes, survival is survival. It sees all dangers as potentially life-threatening. *And the way it is genetically programmed to handle threats is to project them into the conscious mind so that we can prepare for them.*

What happens when we ignore the threat?

Our body/mind is programmed to make us feel vulnerable and unprotected. In other words, we feel very, very uncomfortable whenever we choose not to pay attention to an approaching danger.

This makes perfect sense when we are challenged by a *physical* danger. (Threat: here comes the dinosaur. Image: the dinosaur is having us for lunch. Solution: pile those boulders in front of the cave entrance so we can hide inside and be protected.) But when we confront performance fears (of which stuttering is just one,) the body's lifesaving process actually works *against* us.

To understand this better, let's go back to the original example of my having to jump over the chain.

The perceived danger was that, if I jumped over the chain and caught my foot, I'd trip and fall. My mind read this simply as "DANGER! Get ready. Prepare yourself." My genetic programming then caused my mind to project images of this danger into my conscious mind, so I could protect myself.

But hold on. My conscious mind is also the programmer for my

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subconscious. When I latched onto those vivid mental images of tripping on the chain, my subconscious was alerted.

“Whoopee!” said my subconscious computer. “Here’s a new, interesting problem to solve. Let’s check the “screen” and see what it is.”

And what was on the screen? A picture of my tripping on the chain.

“Well, then,” said my subconscious. “If that’s the problem, let’s figure out the best way for John to catch his foot and tumble.”

Sound crazy?

It’s not.

Remember, your subconscious is not concerned with being reasonable. It simply solves whatever problem you put before it. It doesn’t differentiate between “intelligent” problems and dumb or irrational problems. It tries to solve *all* problems with equal vigor and determination.

## *GETTING OUT OF THE COMFORT ZONE*

“Well,” you say. “That should be easy enough to solve. All I have to do is picture what I *do* want to happen and let my subconscious solve that problem.”

It’s not that easy.

Our body/mind has a way of making us pay attention to imminent danger. Try and *not* notice the big, black spider crawling across the floor toward you. How do you feel? Vulnerable and unprotected and out of control because you’re not doing anything about the threat. Most of us prefer to be frightened but *prepared* than to trust the tarantula’s good intentions. That’s how we’re programmed to react. We are compelled to pay attention to what threatens us.

This is why, as much as I fought it, I had a hard time ignoring the pictures of myself tripping on the chain fence.

Then why didn’t I trip when I finally went over the chain?

Thanks to Maxwell Maltz and his book...as well as years of practicing his visualization skills...I was able to go counter to my natural instincts for self-preservation. I kept forcing myself away from thinking about the danger. Instead, I pictured myself sailing cleanly over the chain. I did this over and over again.

But that wasn’t all.

*I also didn’t resist feeling the vulnerability and general uncomfortability associated with not dealing with the threat directly.* This was not easy to do. As I pictured myself sailing over the chain, the doubts would creep in. I would begin to feel anxious. I’d then have to force myself back, mentally and emotionally, to the positive experience of sailing over the chain. That would last for a while until the next round of self-doubts came in. I’d then

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repeat the process...over and over again. The key was being able to tolerate being uncomfortable.

After picturing successful jumps for a while, something interesting began to happen. My psyche, which (as Maxwell Maltz points out) does not basically differentiate between real and imagined experience, began to have a positive feeling about leaping over the chain. It's as if I'd actually jumped over the fence many times and was totally successful each time. I began to have a backlog of successful jumps. That, in turn, made the thought of a real jump less threatening. My fears began to abate. It was easier to concentrate on what I wanted to happen. And lo and behold, the actual leap, when I finally made it, was a piece of cake.

Was everything I did a guarantee that I'd be successful with the real jump?

No. There are no guarantees. But there were two things in my favor.

First, I was willing to live with the uncomfortability and uncertainty of what I was doing.

And secondly, I made sure that physically I was not doing anything to cause myself to trip. *To be successful at a skill, you must use a technique that is capable of bringing about the desired results.* I needed to make sure I was not dragging a foot or doing some little thing that was causing me to miss my mark.

## *THE EXPERIENCE OF FLUENCY*

For as long as I can remember, my speech was subject to the same performance fears we've been discussing. I never just talked spontaneously and unconsciously like my classmates. My speech needed to be "right", because if it wasn't, then somehow, I was no good. My speech blocks were a threat to me — to my self-image and to others' acceptance of me.

Whenever I had to stand and talk in class or do any of the other speaking chores that frightened me, my mind would react as if I were in a life or death situation.

What was the threat? A speech block.

What did my mind do? It put the threat in my conscious mind, so I could deal with it.

What did my subconscious do? It "solved" the task (that is, the image) I put before it by creating the best way to block. And as far as blocks went, it created some dillies.

How did I get past this?

A long time ago I began to get in touch with how other people must feel when they spoke with *pleasure* in front of people. They weren't just fluent. They were fluent *and* they were enjoying themselves. I remember the first

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time I attended a Dale Carnegie class. I was 24 years old. I sat in class that night and was swept away by the excitement of the trainer, because *he* was swept away by what he was doing. Some day, I said to myself, I'm going to have that experience for myself; not just his fluency, but his *experience*. Over a number of years these images began to build. Every time I listened to a particularly good speaker, I tried to get in touch with how he must be feeling. I tried to get inside his skin. At first the thought frightened me, because being that kind of a forceful, assertive person was not consistent with my own self-image. But over time, that changed. Had I just left it at that, I could have gotten my speech to where it was enjoyable, even though I still experienced blocks.

But I also changed my technique of speaking. Over the years I discovered that I was doing specific things that interfered with my speech. My *technique* was bad. I would jam my tongue against the roof of my mouth. I would tighten my vocal cords. I'd purse my lips shut. I even held my breath. Any of these blocking techniques could (and did!) interfere with my ability to speak. Most of it was unconscious behavior.

I spent a lot of time observing exactly (and I mean *exactly!*) what I did when I blocked. I got to know my speech patterns so well that I can still duplicate my entire blocking routine at will. Step-by-step I discovered what it felt like to relax all these tension points, and then I learned what it felt like to speak with everything relaxed. One day, very much like the day I first rode my bicycle, it came together. For the first time in a pressure situation I experienced the total feeling of what it was like to do it right. (Among other things it was scary.)

At some point, whatever skill you're trying to master, you have to let go of the technique and concentrate on the total experience. A pianist must practice and practice a new piece, paying conscious attention to how and where he places his fingers on the keys. But when he's finally ready to perform the piece, such detailed observation will inhibit his playing. Stated another way, once the technique becomes second nature, he must let go of it and concentrate on the *total feeling* of the piece. He must experience it as a *whole*. He must allow himself to be swept away. And that means not trying to consciously control what he's doing.

If I have any bone to pick with the various fluency shaping programs, it's that so many of them lead you to believe that you must *always* concentrate on your speech. They miss the point. Focusing on your speech is essential in mastering a new technique. But at some point you have to develop a sense of how it *feels* when it all comes together. Then you need to learn how to reproduce that feeling. It is at this point that positive imagery has its most powerful effect.

Those who learn a fluency technique without developing an ability to

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trust in their own spontaneity may be headed for considerable frustration. True, they'll know the mechanics of free speech. Yet, each time they speak, they'll still have a compulsion to hold back. They'll be pulled in opposite directions. This is why people who stutter are frequently disappointed when they learn a technique for fluency, only to discover that they are resisting using it.

For the moment let us end with a summary of the basic points:

- Our bodies are programmed for survival. Our genetic programming makes certain that all threats to our well-being become conscious so that we can take appropriate action.
  - Evolution did not prepare our unconscious survival reflexes to distinguish between physical threats and threats to our social well-being. Our body/mind perceives them both in the same survival terms.
  - Our subconscious is an impersonal problem-solving computer. It solves “dumb” problems with the same energy and thoroughness it solves “intelligent” problems. It will solve whatever we visualize.
  - Speaking (like any other kind of *performance* activity) requires us to visualize what we *want* to happen, as opposed to what we're *afraid* will happen.
  - Deliberately not visualizing an imminent danger will make us feel vulnerable.
  - We need to be able to tolerate feelings of vulnerability, ambiguity and uncertainty if we are to avoid fixating on the danger.
  - Creating positive mental and emotional pictures will affect our nervous system in the same way as real life experiences. The only difference between a real and an imagined experience is intensity.
  - We need to be committed to what we're doing. A strong commitment will keep us pressing forward when the going gets tough.
  - We need to know enough about our speaking techniques to know if we're doing anything wrong. We need to develop a *feeling* of what it is to do it right.
  - We need to be willing to let go.
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Through hundreds of thousands of years nature evolved man into a highly capable, resourceful being. But the one area it never took into account was the fear of asking for a hamburger and fries at MacDonalds. Performance fears are in a class by themselves. To overcome them, you have to go counter to some of your natural instincts.

But it can be done.

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## THE FEELING OF FLUENCY

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What is it like to be fluent? What does it actually *feel* like? When those who stutter think about fluency, their focus is almost always on their speech, rather than on their feelings. They see fluency as simply an absence of blocking. They believe that once fluent, they will be exactly the same person they are now; only their speech will change.

But fluency goes far beyond that. Fluency is a state of being. This state of being is called for whenever a person is called upon to perform any act spontaneously.

Real fluency is not about controlling speech...or about controlling anything for that matter. It's about letting go, so that blocks are no longer consistent within your fluent mindset.

Real fluency is about speaking without self-consciousness. You have an intention to express a thought or an idea, and suddenly, you realize you've done so. It just seems to happen.

This mindset will be found, not just in speech, but also in other forms of expression where the person operates fluently and intuitively without any awareness of self.

What follows is a short collection of personal stories that illustrate the components required to create the *experience* of true fluency.

Why have I used stories?

I discovered years ago that the best way to communicate an idea is by framing it in real life experience. You may think that some of the details are unnecessary. However, I've found that when I want to understand what someone else has experienced, it helps for me to be there with them, in their skin, to understand what they're thinking and feeling. I want to feel what they felt. So let me take you along on some personal journeys that helped to clarify my difficulty with the feeling of fluency.

### THE NEED TO SURRENDER

This first story is an account of how I learned to read at 3,000 words a minute and then lost the skill because I could not tolerate the feeling of fluency.

"Whoa!" you're probably thinking. "People can't read that fast and

actually understand what they're reading."

Not true. A certain percentage of the population is comprised of naturally fast readers. President John F. Kennedy was one of those people. So was my sister Joan. Back in grammar school, Joan routinely read two to three books every weekend. And she comprehended everything she read.

Most people crawl along at 200 to 300 words per minute. They're constantly going back to reread sentences and paragraphs. By contrast, Joan could read an entire novel standing in a bookstore and be able to tell you what she read. I've met people who could read at 10,000 words a minute. And I've heard of one woman who could read at 50,000 words a minute by running her eyes down one page and up the facing page.

I know this sounds unbelievable. It did to me, too. And if I hadn't learned to read at 3,000 words per minute, I never would have believed it.

There are some interesting parallels between verbal fluency and reading "fluency." They involve a similar mindset. I'm going to tell you about how I learned to read at super fast speeds, how I lost that ability, and what I learned from that experience that related directly to my stuttering.

## *READING DYNAMICS*

One day back in the mid-1960s I happened to notice a newspaper ad for a speed reading program. It was called Reading Dynamics, and I was totally stunned by their claims. The typical ad for remedial reading classes talked about doubling or tripling one's reading speed. That by itself would have been compelling. But the ad for Reading Dynamics was promising much more.

"Imagine," said the ad, "that you were able to read at speeds as high as 4,000 or 5,000 words a minute.

"Impossible," I thought. "Must be a misprint." I read it again. No, that's what it said; in fact, those same high reading speeds were alluded to several times in the ad.

In those days I was reading around 200-300 words a minute, so the idea of increasing my reading speed 15 times was an outrageous thought. Yet, the ad quoted people who said they were reading at astronomical speeds. Of course, I couldn't resist, and the next week I signed up.

In the first class I attended at a downtown hotel, Doreen, the instructor, explained that this would be a different reading experience than we had ever had before.

"You mean we'll really be skimming the material," someone volunteered.

"No," she answered. "You'll actually be seeing all the words, but you'll be using your eye and mind in a different way." Doreen explained that the typical person scans left to right, line by line. We, on the other hand, were

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going to read in a zig-zag pattern, using our hand as a pacer to keep our eye moving down the page.

"But how can you understand what you're reading?" someone asked

"That's not a problem," she said. "Let me demonstrate."

Doreen explained that our eye was capable of picking up chunks of text at a glance, and if we concentrated, not on the words, but on using a broad focus and following the thought expressed in the text, our brain would automatically gather in the words and put it all together. We would totally understand what we were reading. But it would take a great deal of practice until we could do this. She then pulled out a soft cover book that someone had bought in the shop downstairs just minutes before class began.

"Find me several pages to read," she said to one of the students as she handed him the book. The student opened the book at random.

"Here," he said, "read the next three pages."

As we sat transfixed, Doreen ran her hand down the first page in a zig-zag fashion, then the next page and the one after that. She read the three pages in about 12 seconds. Then she handed the book back to the student."

"Okay, let me tell you what I read."

Doreen took three minutes to summarize in detail what she had just read while the student corroborated her remarks. She had indeed read and understood what was on all three pages.

Wow!

Seeing someone read this fast was impressive. But *my* reading this fast was another matter.

## *EXTREME FRUSTRATION*

In the first class of this 10-week program, we were asked to give up our old way of reading and start practicing the new way. That was unbearably frustrating. Week after week, none of us could even get close to understanding what we were reading using this new technique. True, some general impressions were getting through, but to say I was understanding what my eye was "reading" was an overstatement. The only thing I accomplished was to chew up a lot of pencils.

"Don't worry," said Doreen. "You'll get it. Just keep working."

During class in the eighth week, something happened that spurred me on. I was involved in yet another frustrating practice exercise when a woman student suddenly shouted out excitedly, "I'm doing it! Wow! This is wild!"

Sonofabitch! Someone broke through. Instantly, my competitive spirit was engaged. Dammit, if that woman could do it, why couldn't I? I applied myself with additional fervor. All I could think of was being left behind by

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someone who did what I couldn't do. It was maddening.

The ninth week found me still deep in frustration. It just wasn't working. *What kind of an experience was I looking for?* It wasn't clear. I simply couldn't imagine running my eye in a criss-cross pattern down the page and understanding what I was reading. How could you read anything that way? True, I could get an impression of the material, similar to what I routinely did when I scanned. But that wasn't "reading." However, I continued to conscientiously practice every night.

In the tenth and final class, I still hadn't had a breakthrough experience, but I did notice that there was something different. I had this *feeling* that something was going to happen. I couldn't put my finger on it. It was just a sense that I was close to something. While nothing dramatic happened in that last class, that expectant feeling continued to hang over me.

The course was officially over. But I decided to attend the practice session that was held on Saturday to give it one last try.

I showed up on Saturday feeling both resolute and desperate. This was it. If I didn't make it now, my investment was for naught. Besides, there was the matter of that woman who broke through and perhaps others as well. I just hated being left behind.

## *BREAKTHROUGH*

Half way through the class I was reading a short novel by John Steinbeck called *The Pearl*. The writing was visual and graphic, and the text was easy to comprehend. I found myself racing faster and faster to see how the story unfolded.

Then it happened.

Suddenly, I was no longer reading. I was thinking the book. The story was taking place inside my head. It was like watching a movie. As my hand criss-crossed down the page, it felt as if I was scooping up the text and funneling it directly into my brain. It required no effort. I was racing along, and all I had to do was to surrender my mind to the page. The meaning seemed to float over the text as the story with all its visuals played itself out on my internal movie screen.

I was reading, but it was unlike any previous reading experience I had ever had.

As I practiced reading this new way, I felt oddly different. It was a reckless, powerful, *fluent* feeling, like being able to predict the future or move pencils with my mind. I was giddy with success.

I took the bus back to my apartment, and on the ride back, I made another interesting discovery. I could run my eyes across the advertising cards inside the bus and know instantly what they said. I didn't have to read

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them in the normal way. One quick impression, and I could tell you what was on a particular card. My eye and brain were now functioning differently.

## *NEW PROBLEMS*

I had learned the skill. But I suddenly found myself with a new set of problems.

This new skill made me very uncomfortable. True, I could read a novel at 3,000 words a minute. That felt good. But I was not comfortable with the feeling that I had to surrender my mind to the page. I found it difficult to trust the process. I found it difficult to surrender.

All my life, I had strived to keep myself under control. I never trusted my intuitions. I never gave in to my instincts. I constantly worried about being wrong. I always had a tight grip on my emotions. However, reading this way called for doing just the opposite. I had to let go and give up control. I had to give in and simply follow along with my mind. I had to surrender, and *that made me feel vulnerable*. I just didn't want to give in to the experience.

So instead of practicing at two to three times the speed I could comfortably read at, as they had recommended, I went the other way. I began to slow down my speed to make sure I didn't miss anything. I began to grab for meaning. What I was doing was trying to gain "control" over my reading experience, like years before, I had tried to gain control over my speech. Gradually, my reading speed dropped lower and lower as I worked to get every last detail. 2,000 words a minute...1,500 words a minute...1,000 a minute...each day I read a little slower, until one day, I was reading so slow that the eye/brain connection could no longer work, and I found to my despair that I had lost the skill.

Try as I could, I wasn't able to get it back.

## *AN UNWILLINGNESS TO CHANGE*

Why couldn't I hold onto the skill? It is clear that at that time, I was not ready to handle the trust and surrender required to read "dynamically." What was called for was just too uncomfortable for me and not compatible with my need to be in control.

I subsequently did research for an M.A. thesis on Reading Dynamics at San Francisco State College. In preparation, I interviewed several instructors from the course. I was curious to find out which professions had the easiest time with dynamic reading, and which had the most difficulty.

"Musicians have the easiest time," said Doreen, the instructor who had taken me through the program. "They're used to working intuitively."

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Musicians know what it's like to give themselves over to the music. They recognize the importance of surrendering to the experience, trusting their feelings, and not consciously controlling what they're doing. I guess you'd say that in those performance moments, 'the music is playing them.'"

One of the program's best instructors was an accomplished organist. When she realized that certain complex pieces she played called for her to read music at over 10,000 notes a minute, she suddenly understood that she already had the proper mindset; it was just a question of applying that same feeling to reading. In fact, she told me of musicians who were able to actually "hear" the music in their mind when they read sheet music using the same dynamic reading techniques.

"I'm curious," I asked her. "Which profession has the most difficult time with this reading technique?"

"Lawyers," said Doreen.

Of course. Lawyers do not automatically trust words. They're constantly looking for shades of meaning. Wrong phrasing can make or break a case, so they feel compelled to scrutinize every word. Because of this habit of thought, attorneys were not, as a rule, successful in mastering dynamic reading.

One thing I concluded from my research was that most people were not able to master the dynamic reading technique. Apparently, the Reading Dynamics organization eventually came to the same conclusion. They ultimately changed their advertising claims, promising only to triple a student's reading speed.

My speculation was that the experience of surrender was not something that most people were comfortable with. I certainly wasn't. True, I was able to by-pass that problem for a short time when my competitiveness was awakened. I broke through because another person in the class had done it before me. But the feeling of competition was short-lived. And so was my reading skill. Without the crutch of competition, I could not sustain the ability to read dynamically.

## *SIMILARITIES*

Some time later, I developed further insight into the ability of my mind to "see" meaning when my wife Doris and I took up conversational Spanish in preparation for an upcoming trip to Mexico. My teacher was Ralph, a Spanish translator at the company where we both worked.

We only had six weeks to get up to speed before we left for Mexico City. In our hour sessions with Ralph, he drilled us in familiar phrases, and to my delight, I noticed that eventually, if he talked slowly and clearly, I could understand exactly what he was saying *provided I didn't focus on the words*. If

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I focused on the meaning, I could follow his train of thought. My brain made sense of it. But if I worried about missing something and shifted focus to the words themselves, everything he said turned instantly to gibberish. It was the Reading Dynamics experience all over again. To understand Spanish, I had to surrender. I had to simply allow my mind to follow the sense of what Ralph was saying and trust that I would understand *without worrying about what I might be missing*. I could not grasp at the meaning. I had to let it happen to me. As I became familiar with more and more words and phrases, I was able to understand more and more of what Ralph said to me. But if at any moment I was afraid of missing the meaning of a word and changed my focus to the words themselves, I instantly lost the train of thought.

In short, *I could not directly control the experience in order to master it*. Mastery only came through repetition, trust and surrender.

This parallels my early experiences with stuttering. Back in my school days, I did not automatically trust that I would be okay when speaking to another person. My comfort with the verbal transaction would constantly ebb and flow. Often I was afraid of doing it wrong. I did not trust. But there was something else I was missing, something that at the time I could not put my finger on.

***“The consciousness of self is the greatest hindrance to the proper execution of all physical action.” – Bruce Lee***

With Reading Dynamics, you’re working with the brain’s higher centers. These higher centers routinely allow a person to do remarkable things. I have seen other individuals perform feats that could only have been done by trusting their higher intelligence. You’ve surely seen some of these as well.

- The first time I watched a young Olympic gymnast work the balance beam, not only did she twirl on the beam, she even performed backward flips without using her hands. The next contestant astounded me even more. She mounted the balance beam by leaping on a springboard and doing a forward somersault, landing securely on the beam. How could anybody trust themselves enough to do such a dangerous-looking act? It was just stunning.

- I have seen even more astounding feats of trust. Some years ago the Russian circus came to San Francisco. Tight rope acts are *de rigueur* for any circus. But in this circus I saw a performer who walked up the slanted guy wire that supported the tight rope from the ground. Can you imagine how

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difficult that is? Then he did a truly “impossible” feat. While still on the guy wire, *he did a backward flip!* To this day, I don’t know how anyone could land a backward flip on a slanted wire. And he did it *six times a week!*

- Have you ever watched the Blue Angels, the daredevil aerial acrobatics team that performs air shows around the world? In some acts two planes fly toward each other at over 350 mph. They clear each other by inches at a combined air speed of over 700 mph. That’s trust.
- How about the pianist who sits down with the symphony orchestra and plays Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue* without ever looking at a page of sheet music. He has memorized the music, the fingering, everything. He simply trusts that his mind and body will perform it, and as he plays, the music unfolds automatically in his mind like the perforated roll that controls a player piano.
- Ditto the actor who loses himself in the role of Hamlet. Beautiful phrases in Elizabethan English roll off his tongue, and he or she simply trusts that they will come out the right way in the right order.
- Practitioners of aikido must retrain themselves to react differently when physically attacked. Instead of defensively challenging the attacker, they turn their body to flow with the assailant, then guide the person to the ground. In the beginning these reactions are counter-intuitive. A person naturally wants to adopt a defensive posture and put up an arm to block a punch or directly confront the attacker. The trainee needs to trust that the proven techniques of aikido will work more effectively, and it takes time plus months of practice to build that confidence.
- Every pilot in training will tell you about the first time he or she did a solo landing. It’s all about self-trust.
- How about the championship tennis player who, one shot away from defeat and with everything on the line, puts his faith in a higher power and risks everything on one go-for-broke forehand. He surrenders to the moment, turns around his game, and eventually wins the tournament.
- Then there is the Zen archer who, seemingly without aiming, shoots the arrow into the center of the bullseye...and then splits the first arrow with a second.

The rigorous training of the Zen archer is described in the seminal book *Zen in the Art of Archery*,” written in the early 1950s by Eugen Herrigel. What

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struck me as I read Herrigel's autobiographic account was the degree to which the student has to surrender himself to the discipline. He has to practice in a way that was totally foreign to my own way of functioning:

- He had to shoot thousands of arrows that totally missed their mark and not be discouraged by his lack of success.
- He had to train his instincts without consciously trying.
- He had to forego any time limits on his quest for success but simply accept that it would take as long as it was going to take.
- He had to put his ego aside and fully surrender to the experience – i.e.: not personally identify with either his successes or his failures.
- He had to be guided and driven solely by his intention.

What is it that inspires some people to put themselves at risk in situations where, to succeed, they have to surrender themselves to a higher force that they cannot consciously control?

Why are some willing to take this chance, and others are afraid to act? And what does it take to be willing to put yourself at risk? What gives you the courage to act?

Part of it is trust. You have to let go and trust.

This is the first requirement of fluency. The second requirement is having conviction and a clear intention.

The next story will help shed light on this issue.

## ***2,600 FEET OVER CALISTOGA***

My feet were sweaty and my stomach dropped as I looked straight down eighty-six floors to the street below. I was 10 years old, and I had gone with my parents to visit the Empire State building in New York. We were at the outside observation area eighty-six floors above the Manhattan streets.

Today, there's a wire fence that stops you from looking straight over the side. It was put there in the early 50s to prevent suicides after several depressed souls hurled themselves over the side. But back when I visited the Empire State building you could lean over the side, look straight down 86 floors, and feel yourself go weak in the knees. I was fascinated by the experience. I also hated it. I was afraid of falling.

Yet 17 years later, I found myself standing on a metal bar outside the door of a small airplane over Calistoga, California. The wind was buffeting me at 80 miles per hour, forcing me to tighten my grip on a second bar that I was hanging onto for dear life.

I was about to experience my first parachute jump.

"So," you're thinking, "if John doesn't like heights and has a fear of falling, what is he doing hanging outside a plane at 2,600 feet?"

Let me explain. Back in New York in the late 1950s I was reading an issue

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of *Esquire* one day when I found a short article on a sport called skydiving. It seemed that a few hardy souls were free falling from planes over a little town called Orange, New Jersey. Imagine that. People were jumping out of planes *on purpose*. As uneasy as I was around heights, I began thinking that this was something I simply had to do.

I've always thought that behind my unease around heights was a secret urge to jump. Just impulsively throw myself over the edge. Why? I'm not really sure. I've heard that a fear of falling is analogous to a fear of failing. Perhaps that's it. All I knew was that I didn't trust heights, and that one day I would have to meet this fear by jumping out of an airplane.

A year after I arrived in California I met a young fellow, Jerry, at my army reserve meeting who was making regular jumps at an airport in Calistoga, about an hour north of San Francisco. He sensed my interest and invited me to drive up with him that weekend to observe. I did, and all it did was to whet my interest even more. The following week I enrolled in the Parachute Club of America and set a date for my ground training which I completed the week after.

The day of my first jump I wrote out a short will and placed it in the sock drawer of my dresser. I then picked up Doris whom I was just starting to date, crossed the Golden Gate Bridge, and headed north toward Calistoga.

Calistoga is a quiet little town in the wine country about 60 miles northeast of San Francisco. It's noted for its mineral waters as well as for its hot springs where you can bake in a mud bath, then ease your way into a relaxing massage. There's also a large, naturally heated pool where families splash and frolic in the summer months. In addition, they have a small airport where, today, glider pilots can get a tow up to 5,000 feet, then cut loose and ride the thermals for as long as their luck holds. But back in 1962 there were no gliders, there were only jumpers. Lots of them.

When I arrived at the airport, Jerry was already there.

"C'mon," he said. "You're late, and you still gotta pack your chute."

Say what? "I thought I get a chute that's already packed," I replied. "I don't know how to pack a friggin' chute."

"It's easy. I'll show you," said Jerry. "We all pack our own."

I had visions of pulling the rip cord, and having nothing but a tangle of lines and silk trailing above me like a Roman candle.

We walked into the hangar. Jerry went over to a corner and picked up a pile that resembled a large bundle of laundry. "Here's the chute," he said. "Let me show you how to do this."

He stretched out the chute lengthwise, then began bunching and folding the canopy. Each time he folded a handful of canopy, he wrapped a rubber band around it to keep it in place.

"That's how you do it. Here, you finish."

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I knelt down and attempted to copy what Jerry did. Except where he bunched and tied a handful of chute every 15 seconds, I was taking a full minute. I was trying to get every bunch the same length.

"Oh for god's sake," said Jerry impatiently. "It's not brain surgery. You can just stuff it in the pack, and it would probably work fine."

I was not convinced.

I hurried as fast as I dared. When it was done, Jerry fitted me into the harness and clipped me together. We stood around for a few minutes until it was time to go and then walked over to the plane. It was a Piper Club with the door removed on the passenger side. Right outside the door were two metal bars welded to the body. One was a foothold for when you stepped out of the door, the other was a handhold.

We piled into the plane, and I was positioned as the second person out the door. The plane took off and slowly climbed in lazy circles. I have a brief mental snapshot of the altimeter as the plane reached 1,500 feet, and thinking "Oh my god, I'm really going to do this."

Today, if you want to freefall, you can make a tandem jump from 12,000 feet or more, strapped to the harness of an instructor. But back in the early 60s there were no tandem jumps, and newcomers were not allowed to freefall until they first completed five static line jumps. These are controlled jumps where the ripcord is attached to the plane so the chute opens automatically as the jumper falls away. All of us were making static line jumps.

When we got to the jump altitude of 2,600 feet and were directly above the landing zone, the jumpmaster threw out a wind drift indicator. This is a weight with a small chute behind it that approximates the drift and rate of descent of a jumper with a fully inflated parachute. How far the indicator falls beyond the drop zone tells the jumpmaster where the jumper needs to release on the other side of the target to give him the best chance of drifting onto the drop area.

In a few moments, the first jumper eased himself out the door and into the 80 mph wind. He was hanging there just an arm's length from me...and suddenly he was gone!

Then I got the sign that it was my turn, and I pulled myself out of the door. I was surprised by how strong the wind was as I held tightly onto the metal bar, all the while keeping my eye on the jumpmaster who was fixated on the ground below. Suddenly he said, "Go!" and I released and pushed away.

I'd like to tell you about those first two seconds before the chute opened, but in truth, my anxiety level was so high that I have absolutely no recollection of it. I just know that when the chute opened, the plane was going merrily on its way, leaving me stranded in the sky.

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This was cool. I pulled on the toggles and turned first in one direction, then the other. Totally neat! Then I surveyed the scene. The light was clear and crisp, and downtown Calistoga lay below me with vineyards and houses stretching as far as the eye could see. It was all so novel and exciting that it didn't occur me to think about the hazards: the water towers, the phone lines, the public swimming pool, the vineyard with its hundreds of wooden stakes pointing menacingly in my direction. The field also had a fence bisecting it, and it was smaller than regulation size, something I didn't learn until later. None of that mattered. I felt totally on top of the world (which I was!)

As I drifted down, I concentrated on keeping myself facing into the wind. For a moment there, it looked like I might land on a large white horse grazing in the field. But at the last minute I drifted past the startled horse, hit the ground, and did a parachute landing fall – the standard forward roll that I had practiced in jump school. As Doris and Jerry ran toward me, I felt like I had just walked on the moon.

For the next week I basked in the glow of my derring-do. I was one heroic dude in my eyes. But perhaps I was not that daring after all. Other novice jumpers were in a hurry to get their five required static line jumps completed, and some made two jumps a day. This allowed them to complete their static line jumps by the third weekend, and a few even did their first free fall. By contrast, I managed to stretch my five static line jumps over a six-week period.

Then we had a short spate of bad weather. I drove up to Calistoga several times, but the winds were too strong for novice jumpers, and I ended up sitting around the airport watching the more experienced guys make their free falls. That's when I started to lose my nerve. Maybe I had too much time to think about it. Maybe I had satisfied my curiosity and the novelty was wearing off. Or maybe sitting around an airport chatting up the other jumpers was just not a scene I identified with.

Whatever the reasons, free falling started to lose its glow, my intention waned, and as it did, my mind began focusing on the dangers. As free falling slowly stopped holding interest for me, I was beset by images of landing in a vineyard or going off course and bouncing off a water tower, or even making news in the local papers by frying myself on a power line or injuring people when I landed in the swimming pool. Suppose the first chute didn't open. Would I have the presence of mind to open the reserve?

The more I thought of the dangers, the more I realized I didn't want to take the risk. If I got hurt for doing something I didn't care that much about, I never could have forgiven myself. And so one day, feeling very incomplete, I gave up my dream of freefalling.

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## WHAT I LEARNED

Over time, I got past the disappointment, but it was only many years later that I understood the meaning of this experience with regard to stuttering. It had to do with the confidence I felt whenever I did something I truly *wanted* to do, and the confidence I *didn't* feel when I lacked those desires. Without conviction, I worried about the dangers. With a strong intention, I only focused on my purpose.

In high school, because my own feelings were seldom clear to me, I was always myself holding back when presenting in class or going up to a stranger or an authority figure. Because I was never grounded in what I wanted, I was so caught up with what I thought the other person wanted to hear that I became afraid to speak my mind. I was afraid I couldn't get it right for them. This, in turn, undercut my self-esteem.

Being in touch with what you like and want gives you the courage to act, and especially, to risk. In Calistoga, when I lost my passion to jump, I lost my nerve.

The same thing had happened with my speech.

## UNCOVERING THE SECRET

How do you change this inability to trust? First, you have to figure out what's going on. Personal change calls for self-observation, because without it, you're flying in the dark.

One of the earliest observations I made about the relationship of courage, desire, and my willingness to put myself at risk took place around my thirteenth birthday. My folks belonged to a Reform Jewish temple. I had decided earlier that year that I wanted to have a *bar mitzvah*. To be frank, I wasn't very religious, but others in my class were celebrating their *bar mitzvah*, and I guess I wanted to be part of the crowd.

The services at our temple were fairly secular, compared to the nearby Conservative Jewish temple, and rather than having to study Hebrew and read from the Torah, as my friends did who belonged to the other synagogue, all I had to do at my *bar mitzvah* was to recite a single paragraph of transliterated Hebrew.

Oh yes, there was one other requirement. It was traditional that the *bar mitzvah* boy participate in the Friday night service the previous evening where, at the end of the service, he stepped up to the pulpit and read the announcements. So it came to pass that I found myself giving the announcements from a sheet that had been handed to me moments before.

"The men's.....club.....will be.....meeting.....at the  
te.....temple.....next....."

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.....Tuesday night at.....sssss.....  
ssssseven.....p.m.”

It went on like that, one painful minute after another, until I had gotten through all the announcements. The shame and mortification I felt as I walked red-faced from the pulpit are still seared in my memory, half a century later.

But the next day, my experience was surprisingly different. Though I was worried about how I’d do with my short speech in Hebrew, it went off without a hitch. I had no trouble at all.

I made note of something that day which was born out in later observations. I noticed that if I had something short to memorize, like a paragraph, and if I could go over it many, many times, if I could make it a part of me so that I felt it and “owned” it and *wanted* to deliver it, then the impulse to block was less likely to arise. At the time, that puzzled me. Later, I began to understand why this was so.

When I rehearsed something over and over until it was familiar, I made it a part of me, and I felt fully grounded. *I knew and believed in what I had to say*. I could feel my attachment to the words. There was no ambiguity, no ambivalence.

The question I posed to myself 20 years later was – “Why didn’t I feel that same groundedness and confidence when I spoke spontaneously?

Eventually, I got it. Speaking spontaneously involved doubt and uncertainty, and I found it difficult to speak with total conviction because *I never knew what I believed and whether or not it was right*. With rehearsed material, my feeling of conviction came through repetition. I could be spontaneous in my presentation, because I had already approved, sanitized, and vetted all the words. I became attached to those words. I claimed them as my own. I didn’t have to worry about being right. It was a sure thing. That’s one of the reasons why people don’t seem to stutter when they sing. Everything – the words, the purpose, the emotional expression – is all worked out beforehand.

I find this issue prevalent in the stuttering world. Those who stutter talk about the fear of being rejected. We grow up so much in need of personal validation that not getting it becomes a survival issue. To place that on the line is to risk rejection and psychic death.

Trusting myself to speak spontaneously and let go was akin to jumping out of the plane and not being certain that the chute would open. Without the conviction that I was doing *my* thing and doing it correctly, I just couldn’t risk it.

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## TOP PERFORMERS GIVE UP CONSCIOUS CONTROL

This gets us to the central premise of this essay – the factor that weaves itself through everything we’ve been speaking about.

This is the issue of *trust*.

To do something fluently, you must give up conscious control and simply trust. You let go and trust.

The student of Zen archery has to shoot arrow after arrow at the target, trusting that if he follows the master’s instructions and practices the right technique and form, that *eventually* the arrows will start hitting their mark. He must do it without thinking and without making any effort whatsoever to consciously control what he’s doing. He must shoot thousands upon thousands of arrows at the target until the inner manager, the mysterious “it” takes over and directs his efforts.

Everybody who achieves a high level of fluency such as the

- high wire tight rope walker
- Olympic gymnast
- trapeze artist
- downhill skier
- concert pianist
- prima ballerina
- juggler
- actor
- calligrapher
- race car driver
- aikido master
- motivational speaker
- student of Reading Dynamics

must adopt an attitude of trust. They do everything they can to master their skill, then at some point they give up conscious control and simply trust. They *must* trust, because the complexity of what they’re trying to do, and the level at which they want to perform, falls outside their ability to control it consciously.

In fact, if the tight rope walker starts thinking about his feet, he may lose his balance.

The concert pianist who obsessively controls his fingers may end up stumbling over the notes.

The aikido master who thinks about what to do as his opponent strikes may lose his focus, and the match.

The professional actor who worries about remembering his lines will probably deliver a wooden performance. His focus will shift from “How do I want to” to “Can I do it?”

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To perform all these tasks successfully, the practitioner gives over control to a higher power. *He* no longer controls what he's doing. His *intention* controls what he's doing. To perform all these skills fluently, he must trust that spontaneously being himself by losing himself will get the job done.

## LEARNING ABOUT THE REMARKABLE CAPABILITIES OF THE MIND

It was October of 1968. I was in the barber chair at the Ambassador Health Club on Sutter Street in San Francisco, thumbing through the latest issue of *Sports Illustrated*, when I came upon an article that caught my attention. The article was entitled "Shooting by Instinct," and it described one Lucky McDaniel, a young 33-year-old instructor from Upson County, Georgia, who could teach somebody to become a crack shot in a little more than an hour. Martin Kane, the author, started out by describing how someone typically approached the art of shooting.

*Most skills allow you to attain a certain level of proficiency through conscious control. Target shooting is a good example. You take careful aim. You breathe according to plan. You watch the front sight drift back and forth across the target. You find it impossible to control the wavering sight, but you hope you can discover a rhythm that will permit you to let off the bullet at the correct instant. You try, therefore, to time the wavering of the sight, the beating of your heart, the extraordinary turbulence of your softest breathing. When you think you have all these things in rhythm, you do not pull the trigger. You squeeze it ever so gently, making sure you are holding your breath. You try to time the squeeze so that the bullet will let off between beats of your mounting pulse.*

That sounded like the way I used to prepare myself to speak. But Lucky McDaniel had a different approach. He called it "instinct shooting" and it delivered virtually unbelievable results. In the article Kane recounted that...

*...he taught me, in little more than an hour, to shoot with such marvelous accuracy that soon I was hitting crawling beetles and tossed pennies with a BB [pellet] gun, with scarcely ever a miss. The first time I ever wore a pistol I was able to draw it and hit a pine cone in the road, at a distance of some 20 feet, six times out of six, shooting from the hip.*

For an over-controlled person like myself, this was akin to heresy. How could someone learn to do this? The article went on.

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*...a student of the Lucky McDaniel method ("The Lucky McDaniel System of Muscular Coordination and Synchronization Between Eyes and Hands") does not trifle with the meticulous. A true McDaniel follower will go so far as to have the sights removed from his weapons because they are a hindrance to him. He will point rifle or pistol as naturally as he could point a finger, pretty much as good shotgunners do: Looking at what he wants to hit and quite disregarding the cant of his weapon or the state of his breathing, he pulls the trigger. He does not squeeze the trigger. He might even slap it, as shotgunners sometimes do. That is all. He hits the target, which may be a flying dime or an Alka-Seltzer tablet tossed into the air by Lucky.*

By this time I was turning the pages in total disbelief. For someone who had found it hard to just let go and speak, the idea of shooting impulsively, with such results, was beyond my realm of experience. A bit later in the article, Kane described McDaniel's teaching method.

*Lucky's method of instruction is a marvel of simplicity. There is, in fact, very little instruction because Lucky does not want to clutter the pupil's mind with inhibitions.*

*The pupil is handed a BB gun and told to shoot it at nothing a couple of times. He is asked if he has seen the pellet leave the barrel. When he has satisfied Lucky that he really has seen it, the pupil is permitted to shoot at objects tossed into the air by Lucky, who stands at his right side and a half-step to the rear. Practically the only advice he gets is to cheek the gun [bring the gun to the cheek] slightly and to look at the object without sighting along the barrel.*

*"Cheek it and shoot it," Lucky tells the pupil as he tosses up the first target, a rather large iron washer, a little bigger than a silver dollar.*

*The pupil generally misses.*

*"Where did the BB go?" Lucky asks.*

*The pupil says he saw the shot pass under the target.*

*"That's right," Lucky says, and tosses up the washer again. "Cheek it and shoot it." The pupil misses again, is asked where the BB went and again he says it went under. Lucky agrees that it did. But on the fourth or fifth miss a pupil may say that he saw the BB pass over the target.*

*No," Lucky says firmly. "It never goes over. You'll never miss by shooting over it. Now try to shoot over it and you'll hit it."*

*The pupil tries to shoot over the washer. He hits it. In that instant he becomes a wing shot. Smaller and smaller washers are tossed into the air and the misses become very infrequent. Eventually the pupil is hitting penny-sized washers and is able to plink them on the top or bottom, as called for by Lucky.*

*This occurs in an incredibly few minutes, usually under a half hour. During that time the shooter has been kept very busy. Lucky gives him no time to think*

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*about what he is doing, no time to theorize, no time to tense up. Targets are tossed in fast succession while Lucky keeps up a patter of suggestion pretty much implying that this is just about the brightest pupil he ever has taught. The pupil is inclined to think so, too.*

*After establishing expertness with the BB gun, the shooter moves onto the .22 rifle. The routine is much the same except that targets may be anything from small clay pigeons to charcoal briquettes, either of which powders in a very satisfying way when hit by a bullet. There is almost never any difficulty in making the shift to the .22. The shooter now has ingrained ability to resist the temptation to aim. He just looks at the target, pulls the trigger when, somehow, he senses that he is pointing properly. This is a very definite feeling but hard to describe. It is a feeling of empathy with the target. Establishment of this "sense" is the big fundamental of Lucky's teaching."*

What occurred to me is that this is how children learn to speak. If there's no fear of stumbling or making mistakes, or if they don't inadvertently slip into bad speech habits, they follow a mindless process of trying, failing, and trying again and again until some inner process takes over control. And lo and behold, they begin to produce words. Kane continues:

*One reason for seeing the BB leave the gun, Lucky says, is that he wants the pupil to "learn to focus on a single object without looking at everything else around."*

*"I tell him to hold the gun easy against the cheek, not force the cheek down to the gun in the regular way," he explains. "As soon as he begins to shoot I know what he is doing wrong. There are a thousand things he can do wrong. But I don't excite him. You've got to give him confidence or he'll tighten up. I tell him he's going to hit the target and most of the time I call 'em right. When he's shooting high I don't just point to where he should be shooting. I throw the objects and point while I'm throwing it. I keep this up steadily so he'll swing into it. Then I keep shifting the target, like from one match to another on the ground, so we won't get wrapped up in one target.*

*"This is instinctive shooting and it's got to come easy."*

Compare this method of shooting to the first method quoted in this section where the shooter painfully and deliberately tries to control every factor. To me the former smacks of a precision fluency shaping technique where the person is trying to consciously control every aspect of his or her speech. The difference between the two methods is that the second way of functioning is fluent. It simply flows. The first is not fluent, even though there may be an absence of speech blocks. Fluency isn't about an absence of blocks. It's about having flow.

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To create flow, the one thing the spontaneous shooter and the spontaneous speaker have to have is *trust*.

You need to trust in something you can't feel or touch or consciously control, *precisely what we as people who stutter and block have trouble doing*.

Whereas you can learn to shoot a rifle the "traditional way" by exercising conscious control and get passable results, speaking fluently and expressively is a highly complex process that *demand*s you to operate on an intuitive level.

Plain and simple, you cannot carefully control your speech and experience the *feeling* of fluency. There are just too many processes that need to be coordinated simultaneously. To have the words flow easily, they *must* be controlled by your *intention*, your subconscious, or what the Zen master would call your "it." This is what runs the show.

When you try to deliberately control your speech, you end up interfering with a spontaneous act and the fluency breaks down. You may be able to speak without stuttering, but many people I've met through the years, people who have tried to control their speech, end up forsaking the fluency technique they had recently learned. They all offer the same reason for giving it up.

"Sure, I can talk that way," they say, "but when I do, I just don't feel like I'm me."

Well, that's no surprise. Self-expression is a spontaneous act. It involves subtle changes in pacing, volume, tonality, and the like. You cannot consciously control this and *feel* free to fully express yourself.

If you don't trust yourself to be spontaneous...if you cannot surrender to the moment...if you have a conflict in your intentions...if you cannot practice the skill and then forget about the practice and just perform the skill...the interference is likely to trigger your self-consciousness. And you'll begin to pull back.

To be truly fluent, speaking must be performed intuitively, just like reading dynamically must be carried out intuitively. And gymnastics. And high wire walking. And Aikido. And playing a musical instrument. And all the other skills that require performance at the highest of levels just to do them properly.

That to me is what fluency is all about.

## *HOW DOES ONE GAIN REAL FLUENCY?*

In 1985, to prepare for a talk at the National Stuttering Association's first national convention, I sat down one day to see if I could come up with a paradigm for stuttering that encompassed everything I had discovered about the problem and about how I was able to disappear it.

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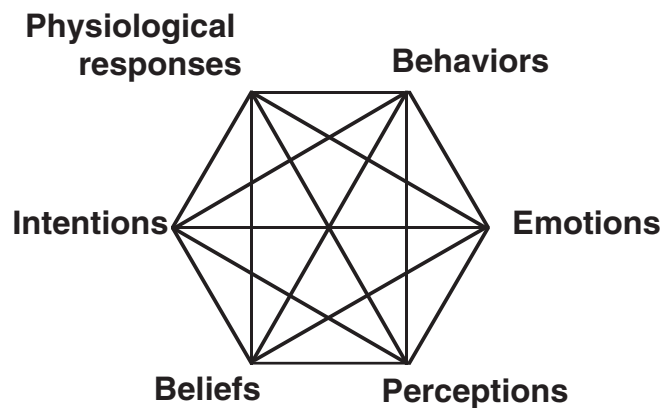
After years of personal growth programs, I understood stuttering, not simply as a speech problem, but as a *system* involving all of myself – an interactive system that was comprised of at least six essential components: behaviors, emotions, perceptions, beliefs, intentions and physiological responses.

This system could be visualized as a six-sided figure—in effect, a Stuttering Hexagon—in which *each point of the Hexagon affected and was affected by all the other points*. It was the dynamic moment-by-moment interaction of these six components that maintained the system's homeostatic balance and that made it so difficult to change.

This model explained why you couldn't just go to a therapist, work on your speech, and have those changes last. To make the changes permanent, you had to change the system that supported the way you spoke.

More to the point, in order to change your speech, you had to change *you*.

## THE STUTTERING HEXAGON



I found the Hexagon a useful concept because it resolved the question of whether a speech block was emotional or physical or genetic or environmental. As you can see by this paradigm, stuttering/blocking is not an either/or issue, but rather, a system that involves the constant interaction of *all these factors*. Blocking is emotional *and* physical *and* perceptual *and* genetic *and* environmental. Each point can exert either a negative or positive force on the other points.

Thus, in a system where most of the points are not supporting your ability to trust and assert yourself, there is little likelihood that gains in fluency or ease of self-expression will be lasting. On the other hand, if you have made gains all around the Hexagon, then this will support greater fluency, because you have not just changed your speech, you've changed

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the system that was prompting you to hold back.

It is only by changing the system that you can create true, uninhibited, spontaneous, mindless fluency.

Unfortunately, many therapy programs adopt a strategy in which the focus is almost entirely on creating deliberate, physical fluency. This may lead to controlled fluency, but it actually creates a mindset that works against spontaneous fluency. It stops you from ever experiencing the *feeling* of fluency, which is mindless, spontaneous, and expressive.

So what did I do to become spontaneously fluent?

I couldn't change my physiological make-up. That was a given. It was encoded in my genes. How I reacted to stress and how quickly I switched into a fight or flight reaction was hard wired.

What was not hard-wired was how I framed my experience.

If I didn't frame a situation in crisis terms, I would not be as likely to initiate crisis-managing strategies (blocks).

I changed my beliefs, not just about my speech, but about myself and about other people. This in turn changed how I perceived my experiences moment by moment.

I resolved conflicts in my intentions – conflicts that fueled my desire to speak and hold back at the same time.

I learned to become more comfortable with my emotions.

I better understood what I did physically when I blocked and learned to relax the muscles that caused the block.

Over time, I made a lot of changes. I practiced speaking in front of others. I learned to become assertive. I became comfortable expressing what I felt. I changed how I framed my experiences. Eventually, I dissolved my stuttering system and stopped thinking about stuttering altogether.

Very gradually, I ended up building a system in which spontaneous fluency and self-expression were synonymous.

## *SUMMARY*

Though you may not realize it, you've been functioning in an intuitive mode all your life.

When you first learned to walk, you focused on placing one leg before the other. Then, one day, you did it instinctively.

Similarly, when you first attempted to ride a bicycle, you experienced difficulty with your balance. You held back, relied on your training wheels, and applied the brake at every opportunity. Suddenly, one day it all came together. You gained your equilibrium and built the confidence to let go and pedal – enjoying a fluent ride.

When learning to drive a car you initially focused obsessively on the

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pedals, the steering wheel, your position on the road, the other cars. You were overly conscious of pedestrians in the crosswalks. After a while you relaxed, the driving became automatic...and fluent.

In the Reading Dynamics, Lucky McDaniel, skydiving, and *bar mitzvah* stories, we saw that developing fluency in a complex skill is mastered through –

- having a clear intention
- mindless repetition without concern for consequences
- developing trust in yourself and in the process.

Yet, when it came to mastering speech, something ran amiss. We stopped trusting. We started holding back.

Over days and weeks and months, the holding back we practiced scores of times a day had consequences. We stumbled. We struggled. We developed unconscious avoidance patterns. These led to feelings of helplessness as well as a flood of negative beliefs and behaviors. Ultimately, we stopped believing we could trust our speech, others, even ourselves.

My parting thought to you is this. It's great to work hard to rid yourself of debilitating speech blocks. But simply having an absence of blocks (ie; fluency at any price) may not be what you've really been searching for. What seems to be the ultimate objective for most of us is the ability to be authentically and expressively ourselves. To capture the feeling of true fluency, we have to first recapture the feeling of trust.

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## A GOLF ANALOGY

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by Jake Dean

*[If you've ever wondered whether the blocking behaviors associated with stuttering are present in other performance activities, this golf story from Jake Dean should win you over. At the time I received this, Jake was a freshman at Cornell University in Ithica, New York. – JCH]*

**H**ello, I am a freshman at Cornell, and I have had a problem with blocking in my speech for about six years. I read your article, and it really applied to me.

I am working with some counselors on campus right now to try and make some progress. When I am alone (as the case with many people) everything is fine, but the moment I have to talk to people, things get all tight, much like the isolated incident you were talking about when you were in San Francisco, except my incidents are not isolated. They are ongoing all day.

It is not very noticeable to other people, but it frustrates me. I look ahead to words that I am going to say, and when I do, I always stop before them. Something really interesting, though, is I had the SAME EXACT thing happen to my golf swing.

I started playing golf competitively at age 12, and I started to care about the result of each shot. I developed this habit of going up to the ball and setting up to it and not being able to pull the club back. It felt as though my arms were frozen and could not move at all.

Eventually the feeling would lessen, and I could just barely get the shot off, but I was not playing to my full potential.

Another interesting point is that when there was no ball there, I could take a swing without a block, which is sort of analogous to the fact that I can speak with no blocks when there are no people around.

The spring of my senior year in high school, I went out to the driving range and I said to myself, "Wow, this does not matter anymore," because I knew I was not going to play golf in college. And those feelings just stopped immediately. I could now control my mind and choose what I wanted to think about.

I have not had that block happen in a full year now. That was pretty remarkable because for six years with my golf it happened on every single shot. I really think there is a link with that and my stuttering.

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## OBSERVATIONS

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by Helen Vyner

I had long thought I was over the stammer that had plagued me for 46 years. I had worked hard at using a breathing technique (developed by the McGuire Programme) which enabled me to control my blocks. In addition, I had worked really hard on changing my mindset, or as John Harrison calls it, the Stuttering Hexagon.

I felt justifiably proud of all that I had attained. I no longer relied on anyone to speak my words, even if I felt under stress or had to deal with a difficult situation. My new found confidence and self-esteem enabled me to take on roles I never would have dreamed possible, from chairing meetings to doing voluntary work with young offenders to arguing and debating my point of view to going into any speaking situation without fear.

To expand my comfort zone, I even joined a drama workshop (something I never would have done as a person who stuttered), and it was in this setting that one evening, all my old fears manifested themselves into a mega speech block.

A little background. Although I considered myself someone who no longer had a problem with her speech, I still felt there was an area for improvement. Not with my speech per se, but with being unable to truly let go. So a drama workshop, which focused on improvisation, seemed to be the answer. And whilst I didn't totally enjoy the experience, every session was a challenge, and I always came away feeling good about what I'd achieved.

One evening we were asked by the teacher to split into groups of four. She gave us an outline for a short scene, and we had to come up with the content. Our group discussed how we should play the scene and various people made suggestions, none of which I was comfortable with. But since I didn't have an alternative. I felt I had no option but to go along with what the group finally came up with.

The problem was, I didn't like the scenario. Even though I had agreed to go along, I didn't feel like it was my choice. Furthermore, they cast me as a TV reporter, a role not of my choosing, and one that I found hard to identify with.

To compound matters, one of our group, a rather voluble and overpowering chap, began dictating to me how he wanted me to play my

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part. I didn't feel grounded, in part because I didn't really understand what was expected. I felt that the role had been foisted on me. I didn't speak up. And most upsetting, I found myself blocking.

Over the next several days, I began to make sense of what had happened. I realized that for a moment, I had fallen into my old mindset and had given away my powers. I was upset because I hadn't had that experience in a very long time, and it triggered all the painful feelings I had experienced as a PWS. I also thought I might lose my freedom of speech and start to stammer again (which incidentally didn't happen).

In short, I had slipped back into the role of a child who was compelled to please others, the child who stammered and blocked.

But curiously, the one emotion I didn't experience was embarrassment. In the old days, I would have spent forever beating myself up and wondering what everyone thought of me. Did they think me stupid? Would they still like me? Would they want to work with me again? I realized I didn't have to go that route, and that was an amazing self-discovery.

Once I became clearer about what had driven me to block, I actually felt elated. Elated because it was an amazing learning curve that has enabled me to understand the kinds of issues that had been behind my speech blocks for so many years.

I found it a truly positive and enlightening experience.

## *HOW MY GOLF GAME DEVELOPED A STAMMER*

Three years or so after going through the McGuire Programme, I considered myself pretty much recovered. I was confident I could go into any speaking situation without the fear of stammering, and in truth, I very rarely blocked. Then I took up golf.

I booked lessons with a pro and found to my surprise that the game was much more difficult and frustrating than I could ever imagine. At this point, something strange happened.

Little by little I realised that my stammer, which I had worked so hard and so successfully to overcome, had re-emerged. Not in any dramatic way – there were no major blocks – no outward signs of a struggle - but on occasions, my speech just wasn't as smooth as it had been. As a consequence, the confidence with which I was able to go into any speaking situation began to very gradually erode.

At first I thought it was just one of those things – that perhaps I needed to work harder on my speech – become more disciplined in the breathing technique that had become my default. Or maybe I had to put myself in more challenging speaking situations.

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But deep down, I didn't think that was really the problem.

Slowly, I began to analyse what was happening. Although I had successfully changed my hexagon in relation to how I felt about myself and my speech, I realised that when faced with this entirely new challenge – a challenge that seemed totally unrelated to speech – all the characteristics I had displayed as a PWS had resurfaced in another area.

How I performed at golf became very important to me. Just like I didn't want to show myself up when I stammered, I now didn't want to show myself up on the golf course. Just like I worried what others would think of me when I stammered, I now worried what others would think of me when they saw me hacking my way round the golf course.

Although rationally I knew my stammer was of no import to others, emotionally I couldn't accept that. And likewise, although rationally I *knew* no one cared how I played golf (golfers are much too self absorbed in their own game to care about anyone else's), I couldn't accept that. I was overcome with the same feelings of imperfection I had wrestled with around stammering. I felt exactly the same way.

Just as I would get angry and berate myself when I stammered, so I would get angry and beat myself up when I played a bad round of golf. I concentrated solely on performance. I placed all my emphasis on not hitting a bad shot. Because I was so afraid of "failure," I didn't allow myself free expression. I didn't give myself a free rein.

In short, I held back.

As a consequence, I developed a "golf stammer"! I had golf blocks instead of speech blocks!!

Now that I realise what was going on, two things have happened. First...hallelujah! My golf has improved. Letting go and having fun on the golf course, not concentrating solely on performance, has improved my game. I don't think Tiger Woods has anything to worry about just yet – but watch this space!

The second thing is that my speech is back to where it was. Although of course, it isn't my speech that is back to where it was, it's my hexagon that is once again well balanced.

I knew the theory. I knew the concept of the hexagon but the reality was much harder to grasp – that my performance is a reflection of my entire self: how I think, perceive, feel, and believe. I would never, ever have thought there was any correlation between the game of golf and my speech.

Now I know there is.

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## RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

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### Maryanne's Story

During my first 10 years in the National Stuttering Project I regularly attended the alternate-week meetings of the NSP's San Francisco chapter. The meetings, usually held at the apartment of executive director John Ahlback, were a real education in the variety of people that make up the stuttering population.

In those days we had a core group of regulars who enjoyed the camaraderie and the opportunity to talk in a relaxed, performance-free environment, and they hardly ever missed a meeting. We also had others whose attendance was sporadic, but who nevertheless maintained a tie with the chapter. Then we had those who were passing through San Francisco and wanted to drop by and see some friendly faces. And finally, we had a large number of often-desperate people who'd heard about us, and who showed up because they thought we had The Magic Pill. Invariably, they were disappointed, and within the month, they were usually gone.

One person I vividly recall from those early days was Maryann\*, a regular at the chapter meetings. Maryann was a shy, retiring woman in her 30s with a moderate stuttering problem. Whenever Maryann blocked, her mouth opened wide as she silently struggled to push out the feared word. Maryann was a primary school teacher, and I suspect, a good one. Married with several kids, she was extremely kind and caring, and as a regular attendee, contributed much to the group's spirit and well being.

Though Maryann usually entered into the casual conversation of the group, she managed to avoid any opportunity to facilitate the meeting. For this reason, I was very anxious to see Maryann expand her comfort zone by becoming the facilitator for the evening. We finally got her to consent to take on the role for the following week.

Our standard meeting format was designed to help people who stutter build confidence and comfort in speaking situations. The first half of the meeting was reserved for sharing. Did anybody have a bad experience to defuse? Made any interesting insights? Those were the kinds of subjects we talked about.

The second half of the meeting was reserved for speaking. The format called for each person to write down a speech topic, then put it in a hat. The hat was passed around, and each person pulled out someone else's topic.

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Maryann's name has been changed to protect confidentiality.

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Talking about the topic was not mandatory, but we encouraged people to build their confidence by giving it a shot. The speaking segment got people out of their comfort zone, yet not so much so that they'd shut down. The focus was on how to make speaking fun.

People were invited to make their talk as long as they liked, up to three minutes, after which they received a generous round of applause. Then they were asked to share what the experience was like. Finally, we opened the floor to only positive feedback. It was a serviceable format, because you didn't have to be a trained facilitator to run the meeting. Anyone could do it.

The role of the facilitator included that of explaining to any newcomer how the meeting would unfold, and it was this part—standing up before the group and spelling out the rules—that Maryann admitted she was uneasy about.

When her night came to facilitate, only four people showed up, and they were all old timers. When Maryann saw that attendance was small, she looked visibly relieved. In her mind, she would no longer have to fulfill her role since everyone already knew the ropes. In fact, a meeting facilitator might not even be called for. It looked like she was off the hook.

Then I had a brainstorm

"Maryann," I said, "would you be willing to do the facilitation anyway?"

It caught her by surprise. She thought she was home free.

"You know, I said, "just for the practice."

It took her a moment to respond.

"I guess so."

Maryann stood up in preparation to opening the meeting, and her discomfort was apparent.

"Now, before you start, are there any speaking situations in which you feel totally confident and comfortable?"

Maryann thought a moment.

"When I teach my classes."

"And do you ever stutter then?"

"Never. I never stutter in class."

"Interesting," I responded. "Would you be willing to try something unusual?"

Maryann gave me a suspicious look.

"It's no big deal. You'll have fun doing it."

"Well, okay," Maryann said tentatively.

"All right, here's the deal. The three of us will be six-year-olds who are totally unruly and full of ourselves. We're going to give you a hard time, and it's your job to keep us in line. Think you can do that?"

"I guess so."

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“Okay, then. Let’s start.”

At this point the three of us began acting like three kindergartners afflicted with attention deficit disorder. We were totally unruly. We talked. We fidgeted. We threw things at each other. We were constantly up and down.

Then suddenly, as if we were witnessing an animator’s sleight of hand,



And once again, she was totally fluent.

Maryann kept it up for about 90 seconds, apparently as long as she could tolerate the feelings. Then, once again, she sat down with a gesture of finality. This was definitely going to be it for the evening.

"How was that?" I asked.

"Okay."

"Okay?" I thought to myself? "For pete's sake, you've just had an epiphany. Don't you realize what happened? Don't you realize the hidden side of you...the *real* you...that just burst through."

Apparently, she hadn't, because the evening ended soon after, and without much discussion, we all parted company.

I went home that night totally elated. I felt that I'd assisted someone through a transformational moment. Surely, she would reflect back on what had happened and see the significance of how this related to her speech. Having had a chance to think about the events, Maryann would come back the next week totally dazzled and eager to repeat the experience. She would see the connection between her beliefs, her feelings, and her fluency.

She'd return with eager plans to continue her transformation. We'd devise new experiments for Maryann, and as she discovered new ways to release her energy, her speech would undergo a rapid, and ultimately permanent, transformation. I couldn't wait for the next meeting.

But Maryann never showed up. Nor did she show for the chapter meeting after that. Nor the meeting after that. Maryann didn't attend another meeting until *eight months* later. In fact, she came just one more night. And then we never saw her again.

## *SOME REFLECTIONS*

I've thought a lot about Maryann over the ensuing years, and I've speculated on what might have been going through her mind. I thought she'd be excited, thrilled by the release and the freedom that she suddenly encountered. But clearly, that was not the case. Was Maryann terrified by this other, more powerful self?

My guess is, she was.

The experience drove home the point that recovering from chronic stuttering is more than just a speech issue. It is a self-image issue. To make a recovery, you need to find the real you. You must get to the place where you accept that new self as the *real* you. To make a *lasting* recovery, your Stuttering Hexagon (i.e., all the parts of you that contribute to the problem) has to change.

But you have to be ready for that change.

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Clearly, Maryann hadn't been ready. Not then, anyway.

But several years later, I heard through the grapevine that Maryann had left her husband and children, and was living by herself in an apartment in another town. I wondered what might have been going through her mind, and whether that evening did have an impact on her after all. Had it unlocked a process of self-discovery? Had she suddenly realized that her life choices were not truly supporting her, and that there was a more powerful self just waiting to be set free? Were cutting her ties and going out on her own the only alternatives she had?

I never did find out.

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## THE LAST GAME

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by John C. Harrison

*This story was written when I was twenty-four. It was the beginning of a difficult time when I didn't know who I was or what I felt about anything in life. Yet, in the midst of all this turmoil I had a sense that I had begun to understand something about my speech, and what was behind the difficulty I had in expressing myself. So one evening I sat down to write a story that would put some of my insights into perspective, and this was the result. The events in the story are fictional, but the feelings are real.*

As Robert walked down the street, he knew he was getting close to the park, for the shouting and the laughter of the boys reached his ears in discordant, uneven bursts. It was Friday. School had let out not a half hour ago, and he still felt the levity and the buoyance of the weekend, long anticipated, which had finally arrived. He felt free as the breeze which caressed his arms and brow and rearranged his longish blond hair into a confused jumble. No one to encroach on his time or order him about. This was truly the luxury of life.

He walked along on the cracked and buckled sidewalk, stepping carefully on the dry, brown leaves that crackled and crunched into a hundred delicate pieces. It was late fall, already past the time when the trees make their final brilliant statement. Fall was a time for dying. Everything died then. The trees became skeletons of former magnificence. The ephemeral beauty of the field crumbled slowly as the tall grass yellowed and wilted in sullen decay. The nations of crickets and locust that charmed him continually over the summer with their dry, rhythmic chirruping were dead or retired into the hardened ground, he did not know which. Yet there was beauty, too, even in this inevitable death of nature. It was a deep and mellow mourning that never failed to move him as he walked alone in the fall.

Up and down the street in front of each suburban home the leaves were piled high or spread in longish heaps, spewing smoke or, when the breeze blew, licking at the air with hesitant flames. The smoke was fragrant, almost aromatic to Robert, for it smelled of the woods and the great outdoors.

Sometimes the burning leaves were tended by gardeners with bamboo or metal rakes. They stood listlessly by, puffing at pipes or dangling forgotten cigarettes from their lips as they watched the smoke rise and the

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flames flutter in the afternoon breeze. Sometimes the gardeners pushed a twig or leveled a burning heap with their rakes. Mostly, they just stood and watched the hypnotic transformation of leaf into cinder and smoke.

Robert turned the corner of Mandell's Candy Store and approached the park. It was not large as far as parks went, but it was quite adequate for the small suburban town in which he lived. There were the winding tar and gravel paths with benches spotted at regular intervals along the way, and concrete fountains which gurgled incessantly. Under the oak and maple trees, which in the summertime shaded the walks, were nurses in starched and snowy uniforms, dragging tots who ran in small, quick steps, uttering little cooing sounds. Old women sat on benches and watched the death of another interminable year, the exact number of which was somewhat hazy or forgotten. One section of the park was open, and at one end there was a backstop and a baseball diamond. Robert walked around the outside of the park until he was close enough to peer over the hedge and see what was going on. He could see the boys choosing sides. Shouting, arguing, and bellicose, they stood in one large group and waited to be picked on a team. It was an honor to be picked early, and Robert could see those left grow sullen as the last few were reluctantly taken on a side. Finally, the sides were complete and the captains flipped for first up.

Robert stole quietly around the hedge and up into the wooden stands. The stands were old and weathered; they had withstood many years of snow and sun and spring rain. He stepped gingerly from one level to the next, careful not to knock his knees or his toes on the splintered boards. He climbed until he reached the uppermost tier and then sat down to watch the game.

It was nice to be alone in the stands, so high up and alone, watching a baseball game on a lovely fall afternoon. Sometimes he would come weekends to watch the game, but then the stands would be crowded with cheering, pushing people and it was never the same. Now, somehow, the game had an exotic, picturesque quality like a scene on the back of a postcard.

From his position in the stands he could see the whole of the park with the barren trees and the people moving slowly along. Outside the park cars moved leisurely on the street. The afternoon sun was low in the sky, and each boy cast a shadow that, from Robert's viewpoint, seemed more than twice his own height.

Monty Cafasso cast the largest shadow of all. Robert recognized him from school. He was a tall, solid fellow, too big for the eighth grade which was claiming him for the second time. He had thick, coarse features and straight, dark hair that he kept from falling over his eyes with a quick flick of his head. What Monty may have lacked in intellectual capacity he made up for in athletic prowess, for Monty excelled in every sport. Some said he

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would one day make the major leagues if he could ever graduate.

Monty was a self-designated captain at every game, as was Johnny Sorro, a less highly endowed but still very competent player. Where Monty was dark and husky, Johnny was slender, quick and light in color and hair. He was quick tempered, too, and had developed some reputation with his fists.

Robert stretched out his arms and legs contentedly on the stands and settled down to watch the game. He liked to watch things and often spent time alone in the woods or fields, observing the bugs and the wildlife. Other times he walked through the center of town, looking at the store windows and the people hurrying about. He liked to see things happening and often followed a policeman from a safe distance, watching him ticket cars and argue with people who came, alas, a moment too late. He had seen three fires and once was lucky to witness a real accident.

The infield began tossing the ball around, while the catcher put on his equipment. Someone threw a ball to the outfield, yelling "Think fast!", and there was a scramble to see who would catch it. The home team gathered around home plate, swinging bats and joking. Sometimes Robert pictured himself swinging a bat and joking, too.

Finally Monty, who was pitching, yelled, "Okay, let's gettun up 'ere," and a batter walked up to the plate.

He swung his bat a couple of times and then held it steady. Monty spit on his hands and wiped them on his shirt front. Robert could see the smudges they made over the light checkered design. Monty took the ball in his right hand and looked confidently at the batter. Then he went into an exaggerated windup, held the ball to his chest for an instant, and fired it toward the batter.

"Steerike!" yelled the umpire who was fat and in his first year of high school.

The batter stepped out of the batter's box, picked up some dirt, and rubbed it between his hands. Monty again looked at him with a confident stare. He tipped forward, cupping the ball behind his back, still looking at the batter. The batter swung the bat a few times and held it steady. Everyone was so interested in the game that no one, except Robert, noticed the little girl until she was upon them.

"Harry," she called out suddenly, and everyone relaxed and turned to look at her. She was about ten years old with dirty long blond hair and a face that, clean, was a joy to the Sunday company. She had on red shorts and a white tee shirt, and walked into the crowd of boys with complete confidence.

"Harry, mother wants you right away," she said in the half-whining, half-mocking, superior voice of little girls who suddenly find themselves in power.

"What for?" asked the boy at second base.

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"Mother told me to tell you to come home right away because you failed in arithmetic, and you haven't done your homework yet."

"I'll do it this evening after supper," the boy said in a tone that seemed to decide the question once and for all, and slapped his glove a couple of times to even out the pocket.

The little girl seemed prepared for this, for she continued in the same matter-of-fact voice of before. "Mother told me to tell you," she insisted, "that if you don't come home this very instant, you're gonna get it."

"Oh yeah? What's she gonna do?" he asked, a little shaken by the threat of unknown punishments, but trying to put up a brave front.

"She didn't say," the girl answered. "She just told me to tell you," she whined, "that if you didn't come home this very instant, you were going to get it."

The boy hesitated. "All right," he said. "Tell her I'll be home in just a minute."

"Now!" the little girl demanded.

"Alright," the boy said and trotted off the field, his face red and his eyes lowered.

"Bye, bye, Fwankie," someone yelled from the outfield and waved his glove.

"Bye, bye," everyone shouted and laughed.

"Ah, shaddup," Frankie said and disappeared behind the hedge.

Everyone laughed for a moment more, and then fell silent and looked at each other. Johnny Sorro broke the spell.

"We need a man," he said. "Anyone got any ideas?"

"How about Jimmy Kent?" the third baseman asked.

"He's sick."

"Mizwinsky," someone else volunteered.

"He moved."

More silence.

"Well, how about HIM?"

"Who?"

"HIM!"

Suddenly Robert realized that they were all looking at him.

"Hey kid," Monty called up to him. "Hey...what's his name anyways?" he asked.

"Prince."

"Hey Prince, you wanna play ball?"

Robert felt his stomach bunch, and he felt sick. He could feel the sunlight on his neck and the sweat collect slowly on his palms. His brow itched and his heart beat thickly in his ears. He struggled with the word, tried to force out a "no", but his throat tightened, and he convulsed slightly before he was sure he couldn't answer and gave up.

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Every second was a year.

He could feel them waiting, waiting for him to speak, to make a sign. He stood up, and the eyes were still on him. He began to descend, stepping slowly over the splintered and rotting seats, down from one tier to another, hoping desperately that some strange boy would turn the hedge suddenly and ask, "Hey, ya got a spot for me?"

When he reached the ground, everything looked deceptively large. Monty looked enormous. He was only conscious now of the boys around him, the light, blond colored bats, the dirt on home plate and the curious glance of Monty.

"We'll stick 'em in right field," Monty said. "Joey," he called, "you play center field and let Kip take second." The switch was made, and someone tossed Robert a glove. He caught it and put it on, and pounded out the picket with his fist.

"C'mon," Monty said. "We haven't got all day."

Robert broke out into a trot and moved through the infield, feeling insignificant and very skinny. He moved out into right field, and as he escaped from the shadow of the trees, his own shadow jumped out along the ground. It looked just like the shadows of the other boys he had seen from above.

Robert stood in right field, his eyes squinting in the sun, and wondered what the boys had thought of him when he sat in the stands without saying a word. Did they think he was stupid because he did not answer? They must have suspected something. At least some of them were in his home room class and knew what he was like. Perhaps they pitied him. They could have played with only eight men. They didn't need him. Look where they stuck him...in right field. Nobody ever hit to right field. They just needed him for a dummy, a fill-in. He hoped that no one would be lucky enough to hit to right field. He prayed it would not happen.

"Hey, a little chatter from you guys," Monty yelled from the pitcher's mound.

"Hey, no batter, no batter," they cried.

"Way to go, Monty baby!"

"Knock 'em outta there!"

"Couldn't hit it if you handed it to 'em."

"That's the way to pitch it," Robert yelled in a voice that seemed to him brittle and high pitched.

He tried again, attempting to emulate the hoarse, caustic voice of the center fielder.

"Way to pitch it, Monty." It sounded a little better.

Robert shifted his weight to one foot and stood waiting for Monty to pitch the ball. He punched the pocket of his glove a couple of times. His legs felt weak, and the queasiness that he had experienced in the stands had not

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left him. He felt he could very easily throw up. He saw the center fielder look over at him, and dropped his eyes to avoid the glance. He wondered if the other team was looking at him. He wondered what they were saying. He was afraid to guess.

Monty retired the sides in short order. Robert dropped his glove on the ground and jogged in toward the backstop, wondering what he was going to do. Everyone was grouped around Monty who was giving out the batting order. Robert hung inconspicuously on the outer edge of the group and listened for his name. It came up last.

"Where's whatisname?" Monty asked.

"Prince," someone volunteered.

"Right here," Robert said hurriedly in one breath without giving himself time to think.

The group parted, and Robert found himself face to face with Monty. Monty's face was all sweaty, and his hair hung over his eyes.

"How're you at hittin'?"

"I-I-I-I d-d-don't know," Robert said, trying to keep himself calm, trying to think of every word before he said it.

("Robert thinks too fast," his aunts would volunteer. "Robert stutters because his brain is going too fast for his speech.") Robert had tried many times to think of each word before he said it, but it very rarely did any good.

"Well," Monty said, "I'm puttin' you last for the time bein' but if you hit, we'll move ya up. Seems there's one or two on the team what orta be moved to the bottom, the way they been fannin' the ball like they was wantin' to cool it off or somethin'.

The crowd snickered.

"Batter up," the pitcher called from the mound.

The group spread out, and the leadoff man picked up a bat and went to the plate.

Robert wished he were invisible. He slunk against the backstop and thought how different it was to watch the game from the upper row of the stands. It was much more fun that way. He could see everything a lot better, too.

The boy at the plate hit a ground ball to the short stop who threw it to first for the out. Another came up to bat.

"You in the seventh?"

Robert looked up.

"You in the seventh?" the boy repeated. His name was Julian Harrod. His family was British, and he was very popular in the seventh grade.

"Yes, I-I-I am," Robert said. The British boy's features were sharp and straight, like Robert's; the eyes gentle and understanding.

(How many times had his mother said, "Robbie, you look like the King of England when he was a boy. Such a nice, refined look.")

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"I say," Julian remarked. "Haven't seen you around much."

"I-I-I'm in S-S-S-Scanlon's ho-home room. You're in P-Power's."

"But after school..."

"I go home," Robert interrupted. "My mother n-needs me around the p-p-p...house," he lied.

"Well," Julian said. "We could use an extra chap around here. This sort of thing is always happening. If it isn't Harry, it's someone else. Don't you think your mother could spare you in the afternoons, at least until the snow comes or it's too cold to play?"

"I don't know," Robert said, suddenly flattered and surprised at the interest given him. He had somehow thought that Julian had avoided him, and was shocked to discover that the boy didn't even know he was around. "I might ask her."

"Do that," Julian said. "We could use you."

The boy at the plate swung at a curve ball and struck out.

"Well, let's see if I can hit a smasher," Julian said as he bent down to select a bat. "Wish me luck." He turned and walked up to the plate.

"Good luck," Robert said. He realized a moment after that he had hardly stuttered at all.

Julian took a stance at the plate and waited for the pitcher to throw the ball. He swung at the first pitch, and it bounded over the head of the center fielder. Julian ran like a cat, while the center fielder chased after the ball, knees pumping high. Julian rounded third, started for home, and then trotted back to third base as the ball came bounding into the infield. The team cheered, and Julian tipped his cap.

It was two out and a man on third. "Hank," Monty called. "Get up 'ere and knock The Julie in."

Hank was a tall, angular boy with a hawklike nose and black, curly hair. He sauntered up to the plate, swung the bat just once, and waited for the pitch. When it came, he took one terrible swing and missed it by feet.

"Hank, for Crissake," Monty grouched. "Ya swung even before he let go of a the damn ball!"

Hank took his position again and waited. The ball fired toward the plate, and Hank, swinging his terrible swing again, missed the ball by an even greater margin.

"Almost got a piece of it," Hank said.

"Yeah," Monty answered. "Its shadow."

The others laughed. Robert found himself embarrassed for Hank.

Once more, Hank took his position. This time he took two practice swings. The pitcher eyed him speculatively, wound up in a mighty arc, and threw in a floater that barely moved toward the plate. Hank swung while the ball was still half way to the plate. There was a swish and the-slap of the ball in the catcher's mitt.

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Monty was hopping mad. "Miss 'em like that an you can go back to baggin' groceries."

"Ahhh, nuts," Hank said, as he dropped the bat and walked to the field, for the sides were retired. Robert shot a glance at Monty, and to his surprise, saw that he was smiling.

"He's laughing at Hank," he thought, "because Hank struck out."

Then he, too, trotted into the outfield.

As Robert stood, glove in hand, waiting for Monty to throw the first ball, he began to feel more confident. Not that he was completely at ease, but the nausea was gone, as was the trembling in his legs. He felt alert and strong and almost wanted someone to hit a ball out to him. Not a hard ball or a high one. Not yet, anyway. Just one that he could field easily and throw into the infield to hold the runner at second. Later on in the day, or perhaps tomorrow, he could try to catch a long, high fly ball, the kind that one runs for and snares in a daring leap amid the cheers of his teammates.

It was nice of Julian to invite him to show up tomorrow. Perhaps if he came enough he would become very good and then Monty would let him play the infield. He would like to play third base. Often, when he was alone in his yard, he would practice with a tennis ball, throwing it against the side of his white, stucco house. He would throw the ball at a target of black paper, a circle fastened to the wall with Scotch tape. (His mother thought he was so smart and considerate, so careful not to mark up the wall with dirt. Scotch tape, she had remarked to his father at the dinner table, leaves no mark when you take it off.)

Once he had hit the black spot three times in a row and was very proud, for he knew that no one, except maybe Monty, could do that. Yes, he would like to play third base, for then he could show off, show the others how quick and how straight he could throw the ball to first.

Monty pitched the ball. The batter swung, and it was a strike.

It was nice to play baseball, much nicer than just watching it from the stands. At the end of the inning he would go back and joke with the other guys behind home plate. Maybe if he concentrated hard, really hard, he could talk without the stutter. Then it would be no question that he was part of the team.

Monty pitched a third strike, and the batter walked away. Another came up to take his place.

He hoped he could hit. He was not very big, but he knew that if he really wound up, he could give the ball a good sock. Not a home run. Just a double, maybe. He would eat more, he would get heavier, and then, perhaps, he would be able to hit a triple...or even a homer. They would shake his hand when he stepped across the plate, and he would grin and tip his hat the way Julian did when he got a hit. Monty might even raise him to the top of the batting order. He would be the "cleanup man", number three in the batting

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order. They would count on him. Monty would say to him, "Get up 'ere an' give those bums a hittin' lesson." And Robert would nod and point to center field and say, "Watch out there, Monty," and Monty would watch the ball sail into center field and see Robert run catlike and smooth around the bases. And Julian would pat him on the back and say, "Good show."

Monty pitched, and the batter hit a bumbling little grounder to the second baseman who threw it to first for the out. Another batter got up to the plate.

The sun was orange, and the air clear and cool. Somewhere, there were still leaves burning, and the woody smells just faintly reached his nostrils. Distant voices called, soft and musical. Underfoot, the grass was green though there were parched places where everything had died. Behind him a train clattered into the station, and he could hear the children shouting. He thought of the many times he had gone to the station to watch the trains pull in, and he could picture even now the men with the newspapers and the tired faces, stepping wearily from the platform....

There was a crack. Robert saw the ball first as it stretched high in the air, coming toward him. His mind panicked and closed tight. He could not think. He watched the ball climb. It could go past him. He began to run back. If only he had been watching. He ran backwards, watching the ball come down. As it descended, it seemed to pick up speed. It was coming for him. He reached up, felt the ball hit a little high of the pocket. He felt the ball run off the fingers, turned to see the ball hit the ground and roll on. He ran after it, throwing the glove down, ripping it from his hand, so he could run faster. He stepped out to stop the ball with his foot. Missed. Ran and stepped out again. Stopped it this time. Grabbed it as it made a final feeble bounce. Almost dropped it again. Threw it with all his might into the infield. Felt the unused muscles strain as he threw the ball up. Watched as the ball dropped, bounced, again. Watched as the short stop took the ball and threw it towards home. Saw the ball reach home plate just a second after the runner. Watched the third baseman as he threw down his glove in disgust. Saw them pat the runner on the back. Saw Monty as he looked toward right field.

Saw his eyes, hard and cold, upon him.

Robert walked back to his glove, the blood thumping in his ears. He was conscious of nothing except the pounding and the heat of his flushed face. He breathed heavily, sucking the air in gasps. He felt sick, wanted to be sick, wanted to double up in pain and black out. He wanted to be conscious only of the figures towering above him, saying, "How is he? Is he okay? Somebody get a doctor. I hope he's all right." He gagged and thought he might throw up, but did not. The game progressed somewhere beyond him.

Finally, the sides retired, and Robert walked in slowly from right field.

He walked through the infield, holding his side in obvious pains but Monty's eye caught him before he even reached home plate.

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"Hey...uh...", Monty groped for his name. "Hey Prince, what was you doin' out there, sleeping or sumpin? All you had to do was walk back an' hold out your glove. That cost us two runs an' now we're behind."

"I-I-I-I-I'm s-s-sorry," Robert stammered, his face contorted with the effort. His mind seemed wild and confused, and nothing was clear. He was sure that everyone watched him and panicked at being the center of attraction.

"You as bad at batting as you are at fieldin'?" Monty asked.

Robert tried to answer. From somewhere deep inside a stentorian voice said, "Think before you speak, Robbie, think before you speak."

He tried to think, but somehow couldn't get it quite clear. "I da...I da...I da... I da...I don't know," he mumbled.

Monty looked at him and grinned in the same way that he had grinned at Hank when he made that one mad, desperate swing and struck out. "He's laughing at me," Robert thought. "He's laughing at me because I can't talk straight, and because I couldn't catch the fly ball."

Robert looked away, mortified, and slunk over to the backstop where nobody would see him. He hoped Julian was not around. He looked to see that no one was watching and then stole around the hedges and crept onto the sidewalk. He did not look back. He was afraid that if he caught anyone looking at him, he would not be able to move.

When he was down the street a little way, he began to run. He ran until he was dizzy, until the ground had spun past him for a time that seemed an age. He ran, leaning forward, pushing himself ahead just at the moment when he would fall. His legs ached and his stomach retched. He ran until he reached the open field next to his house. Then he collapsed into the tall, rustling grass and sobbed a choking, gasping sob which made his head spin. He stayed that way until, after a long time, his breathing once more became regular.

Robert lay in the tall grass and looked at the sun. It was a deep orange now, as it always was before it set. The clouds were red, orange, yellow, graduating from one shade to another in an even flow of color. The breeze whispered across the top of the tall grass, making it sway and roll like the ocean.

Robert watched the breeze and loved it very much. Loved the way it cooled his forehead and the abandon with which it ran. He loved the orange sun, and the house across the way which blinked sullenly as the lights were turned on inside for the evening. He loved the way night approached in the east, the sky a deep blue, turning to black at the horizon, and the way the clouds, a deep red, pushed their way across the heaven.

As he lay on his back, an ant scurried up his side and across his stomach. Robert watched its frantic journey and wondered if it really had any place to go. Ants were always in a hurry, even when they were lost.

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After a while he rose to his feet, stretched, and walked out of the overgrown field onto his own street. People were returning for dinner, some in cars, others on foot, slamming doors and calling evening greetings to one another. Men in hats and dark suits went up front walks. Boys with bats, gloves, and catcher's masks waved good-by, calling "See ya," and "Good game," and separated, each to go his own way.

Robert loved the approach of evening. Everyone was going someplace. Everyone was going home. He had a deep feeling of brotherhood. Boy, man, wind, and evening sun; it was all part of one great whole.

He walked up the street to his own home, a white stucco house with green shutters and a peaked roof. The sun made the white walls a rich cream color, and Robert thought the house looked particularly nice.

Inside, his mother was setting the table. "Robbie," she called.

"Yes, Mother."

"What did you do today?"

"I p-p-played b-b-baseball, Mother."

"That's good. Did you have fun?"

"Yes, Mother."

"Dinner's almost ready. Run up and get washed."

"Yes, Mother."

Robert went upstairs and washed his hands and face. On his way down he stopped to look out the window at the sun. The sun had set, and the sky was rapidly becoming dark. Lights of cars crept down the street. Robert thought that evening was the nicest time of all.

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## A LONG WALK

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by James P. O'Hare

*[Years ago I saw a gripping movie about the sheriff of a small western town who refuses to run from a showdown with hired killers. The movie, as you may remember, is High Noon. The film had a powerful message for me; namely, to be free of a fear, you can't run. The only way to prevail is to take a stand and say, "Here I am. Let's face it." Certainly, that attitude is important for anyone trying to come to grips with his or her stuttering. Through the years many inspiring articles in the NSA's monthly newsletter, Letting GO, have reflected this attitude. This piece by Jim O'Hare is one of the best. – JC H]*

The distance was twenty feet. From the folding chair to the makeshift podium warped on the sides and covered with a stain faded from years of perspiring hands, it seemed as if each foot was a long and tortuous mile.

As I rose and made my way past the hundred odd faces, startled and bewildered by the very through of my soon to be delivered words, the ghosts of countless humiliations, frustrations and tears accompanied me. Although inaudible and racing almost as fast as my heart beat, these ghosts echoed every sentiment that was ever directed at me from nearly four decades of voices filled with compassion ("Oh my! That poor young man has such difficulty talking!"); indifference ("What in the world is wrong with that kid?"); and insult ("C'mon, c'mon, spit it out, Porky Pig!"). Yes, the distance was twenty feet. And yet, it had taken me twenty-four years to walk it. It had been a long time in coming, and the effects will be a long, long time in dissipating. I stood tall on that warm and humid evening...and I have yet to stoop since.

It was August 13, 1988 and a more than fitting climax to an otherwise oppressively fervid and uneventful summer. At the Knights of Columbus Hall, on the far east edge of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, the LaSalle High School Class of 1968 was reconvening to celebrate twenty years of accomplishment, defeat, glory and sadness. The usual complements of dinner, happy hour and dancing were brought together by an event that most were unaware of. You see, I was going to give the after dinner address to my classmates...classmates who knew quite well that I stuttered all those years ago...and know that I stutter now. Although I was to find out soon that my

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disfluency had *never* been an issue for them, it was the biggest of issues for me and had left me with a gnawing, lifelong fear that they had never taken me seriously and that I had always been the “odd man out” or the “poor fellow” who couldn’t talk.

Because of this cancerous apprehension and because I had attained some degree of success as a speaker in a Twin Cities Toastmasters Club, I had written a speech early in the spring dealing with the calamity of the year 1968 with the express purpose of delivering it to my class. There were a pair of demons I had to face. These demons, fear and uncertainty, were to take on human form in the innocent people who sat before me. These demons had resided in the back regions of my psyche for twenty-four years...since the first day we had entered through the front doors of LaSalle together. These were friends who, with few exceptions, had skirted the verity of my stuttering with as much tenacity as I had. **If I was to break with the past...a past riddled with shame and guilt from never having come to terms with my stuttering...and if I was ever to make peace with the person I face each morning in the mirror, I had to walk that twenty-five feet, acknowledging, for the first time to them, that *I do stutter* and move on!** I had to *let go* of all those ghosts, demons, memories and self-recriminations. And, I had to do it now!

With a forehead awash in sweat, knees knocking like door handles and my Arid Extra Dry hopelessly overburdened, I began with what was a completely ad-libbed declaration: “As each of you knows,” I said while meeting every eye in the room, “I have stuttered all of my life. While we were together at LaSalle, there were many people, perhaps even some in this group who believed that public speaking was beyond my grasp and best left untried. For years...many more than I choose to admit...I believed the same thing. Yet, in May of this year I delivered the speech I am about to deliver here and carried home a trophy. I guess I fooled them, wouldn’t you say?”

The applause was thunderous but nothing like the ovation I received when the speech was finally concluded. With more than a few tears in the crowd...and one or two falling down *my* cheek, I made my way back to the folding chair oblivious to everything except the realization that I had exhumed, faced and excised the most influential ghost in my life.

It has taken me this long to sort through the emotions I experienced that night and even longer to put them on paper. The feelings of pride, relief and achievement that were born then have lessened with the realities of daily living, but the impact they have had upon my spirit will likely be ever present. But, the real product, the real discovery of that August 13th is the one that has taken the longest time and greatest effort to accept. *That is the truth that my stuttering did not matter to these people...or to most anyone else!*

Please pause to reflect upon this statement. No doubt, this truth is

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applicable to each of you! Quite frequently, our perceptions of others with respect to our stuttering is completely without foundation. As a result, all too often we *miss opportunities* for intimacy, growth, pleasure and just plain fun because we hold firm to the unsubstantiated tenet that our stuttering *prohibits* us from experiencing our own life. We hide further and further from those around us, and we sink deeper and deeper into the mire of self-doubt, self-hatred and self-pity! Make no mistake, I lived in those three prisons for most of my life. But, at a certain high school reunion surrounded by Iowa cornfields, all that changed. *I gathered up what meager courage and pride I possessed and took the risk of letting go of all those ghosts!* It took me twenty-four years. How much longer can you wait?

In closing, I must tell you that I still stutter...and quite obviously at times. In that sense, my stuttering was not “cured” by any means. But, since that summer night, I cannot look at myself, my stuttering or the world in which I live in quite the same way. I am no longer the “odd man out” or that “poor young fellow.” Rather, I am someone who faced his greatest fear...and let that fear be the first to blink!

And, finally, please understand that my ability to rise to the podium that night was, in large measure, due to the support and strength I have received from the NSP. The National Stuttering Project can indeed change lives, and I wish to express my gratitude to everyone involved in the cause. May you all grace the NSP for many years to come.



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PART

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THE ROLE OF GENETICS

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## P A R T 4

Over the years I don't know how many times I heard that stuttering was genetic, although people never seemed to have any data to back it up. But at the end of the first decade in the new century, the game changed, or so it would appear. Studies by several research teams in early 2010 report that based on their results, genetic factors can cause stuttering. And everyone including the general public, the stuttering self-help community and the professional world has been quick to jump on the genetic bandwagon.

Here's a sampling of quotes from various websites and blogs in June of 2011.

*I too believe stutterers brains are wired differently and hopefully they will come inching closer to what's really needed. There is no cure for stuttering and that's a known fact. Stuttering is a neurological flaw. – PWS*

*I believe yes the brain is wired differently where the brain impulses either get stuck or something. – Parent of a stuttering child*

*This is a very exciting discovery. It validates our view that stuttering has a genetic component, and that it is not behavioral. Emotional factors do not cause stuttering. – Board chairman of the National Stuttering Association*

*Very few people - and sadly that includes many stammerers - realise that stammering is a symptom of a condition in which the brain's neural circuits for speech have not wired normally. – Board chairman of the British Stuttering Association.*

*The study provides further evidence that stuttering is not a behavioral disorder but has as its origins, genetics manifesting in abnormal neuronal activity. We have learned much recently from*

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*brain imaging and pharmacologic studies that stuttering is associated with abnormal neurophysiology.* – Gerald A. Maguire, M.D. Associate Professor of Clinical Psychiatry at the University of California, Irvine School of Medicine.

*For hundreds of years, the cause of stuttering has remained a mystery for researchers and health care professionals alike, not to mention people who stutter and their families This is the first study to pinpoint specific gene mutations as the potential cause of stuttering, a disorder that affects 3 million Americans.* – James F. Battey, Jr., M.D., Ph.D., director of the NIDCD.

*Stuttering may be the result of a glitch in the day-to-day process by which cellular components in key regions of the brain are broken down and recycled.* – Feb. 10 Online First issue of the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

Now there's nothing wrong in hunting for genetic components. But what if all those genetic factors cause, not stuttering as such, but rather create favorable conditions for stuttering, just like a speck of dirt inside the mollusk's shell creates favorable conditions for a pearl to grow. In other words, instead of interfering with fluent speech directly, those genetic factors only increase the likelihood that a child would learn how to hold back and block. This would answer the question of how the same factors acting in childhood could lead to stuttering in some people but have no apparent effect upon others.

What we're trying to do in this book is to show that stuttering is not a genetic problem per se but an interactive self-supporting *system* that involves the whole individual, and that by changing how the system operates, we can dissipate the stuttering and blocking. Of course genetics plays a role, but we suggest that genetics does not *cause* stuttering per se but rather, figures indirectly in the personality and the physical and emotional makeup of the individual.

For example, researchers keep discovering "obesity genes." But does it mean that all overweight people have those genes? No, it is not necessarily so. It also doesn't mean that those who have the obesity genes will become obese regardless of their diet and lifestyle. Or that they will never be able to lose weight. In the case of obesity, having a genetic predisposition to it only means that some people will gain weight more easily than an average person and that it may be harder for them to lose weight and to keep it off. Just as we know many cases of overweight people who were able to become slim and athletic, there are many people

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who stutter who became powerful communicators and either completely eliminated their stuttering or pretty much beat it into the ground.

You may or may not be convinced, but the three pieces in this section will hopefully get you thinking. The first piece takes a common sense approach by challenging common assumptions about stuttering and calling attention to factors that get us off track. The second piece by Anna Margolina, Ph.D. is written by a person with scientific training who not only challenges the interpretation of the research, but also presents an alternate and very plausible explanation for struggled speech. The third piece explains the Zen approach to mastery and shows how free and fluent speech is developed by following the Zen way.

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## IS THERE A GENETIC BASIS FOR STUTTERING?

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Is there something buried deep in our chromosomes that lies at the root of stuttering—a stuttering gene, if you will, that affects us in the same way that some lurking genetic presence creates multiple sclerosis and cancer? If we don't turn to genetics, how can we possibly explain the fact that stuttering often runs in families?

I'd like to begin this exploration by making an improbable comparison and talking about something far removed from stuttering—the atrocities that took place in Kosovo in 1999.

Like many people, I was appalled when I first heard about "ethnic cleansing." I was even more stunned to discover that the bad feelings between Serbs and ethnic Albanians reach far back in history, as far back as the fourteenth century. At the Battle of Kosovo in 1389, the Serbs were defeated by the invading Ottoman Turks, and by the mid-fifteenth century, all of Serbia, including Kosovo, had fallen under Turkish rule. This initiated the beginning of a Serb migration northwards to Bosnia, and the replacement of Serbs by mostly Muslim Albanians who came to the fertile lands of Kosovo from the more arid, mountainous regions of Albania. To this day, Serbia still sees Kosovo as belonging to them, while the Albanian nationals in Kosovo continue to push for independence, and in this controversy over land, the animosity between Serbs and ethnic Albanians continues to fester.

But for *500 years*? There must be some explanation for the persistence of such rancor. How could these animosities be transmitted so effectively from one generation to another? Ah, I have it. At the heart of it, the Serbs must have a genetic predisposition to kill Albanians, while Albanians have a genetic predisposition to kill Serbs. *That* would explain it.

An absurd conclusion, of course. Genetic predispositions aren't the only determinants that can run in families for centuries. Other factors can be communicated from one generation to another. But these factors are never even considered when it comes to stuttering, because of the tendency we all have to enlist one mystery (in this case, genetics) to explain another.

Genetics is one of the catch-all answers that people turn to whenever they run out of ideas to explain the unknown. For example, if I've heard it once, I've heard it a hundred times—"Since my father (mother, uncle, aunt, brother, etc.) stuttered, there must be a genetic predisposition in my family to stutter."

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Many researchers have taken the bait. There has been considerable research among scientists to find and isolate a stuttering gene, or at the very least, the key genetic factor that is the central cause of stuttering. Maybe it has to do with the timing of speech, they say, or perhaps it relates to a failure in the auditory feedback system. Whatever the cause, a growing number of people have had the inside of their skulls illuminated by an MRI scan, or had their blood drawn and analyzed by scientists looking for clues to their stuttering in the ghostly patterns made by their DNA on film.

I applaud their persistence, but I suspect that history will ultimately prove their efforts futile. There is a much simpler explanation to why stuttering often runs in families.

Yet, this explanation seems to elude researchers in speech pathology. Why?

Because they suffer from a common malady. It is something we call *paradigm paralysis*.

### *THINKING “INSIDE THE BOX”*

A paradigm is a model, a shared set of assumptions about how we perceive the world. Paradigms tell us what we need to pay attention to and what we can safely ignore. Paradigms are essential because without the ability to filter the important from the unimportant, we’d have to wrestle with too much data and too much sensory input.

But sometimes a paradigm can work against us. This happens when the paradigm filters out information that is really important—data, impressions, information that we *should* be noticing and dealing with. I propose that this is precisely what has happened with stuttering.

Some years ago, researchers decided that chronic stuttering was a unitary disorder primarily caused by a malfunction of the speech-making system. They weren’t precisely sure what was malfunctioning. But they were sure that if they looked hard enough, the answer would be forthcoming, and that they’d find it somewhere in the dark recesses of the brain.

By totally embracing this belief, their thinking became paralyzed. By staying within the familiar paradigm, they limited their research for alternative answers. They kept their thinking “inside the box.” In so doing, they allowed the probable cause of stuttering to slip between their fingers.

To better understand why their thinking went amiss, let’s examine four key assumptions on which genetic research into stuttering is founded.

- We can all agree on what we mean by “stuttering.”
  - We can accurately identify when a person is blocked.
  - Only genetic factors can be transmitted from one generation to another.
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- You can do meaningful research without having a clear idea of what you're looking for.

**ASSUMPTION #1: WE CAN ALL AGREE ON WHAT WE MEAN BY "STUTTERING."**

In determining whether stuttering is genetic, researchers approach their investigations as if "stuttering" were something very specific. But is it? Let us say that you have four people who stutter. One suffers from a physical disorder such as Parkinson's, another is a young child still trying to master speech, a third is a person who tends to stumble when she's flustered, and a fourth is a person who frequently finds his speech locked up, rendering him unable to speak until the block is released. Because of the lack of useful words to set apart one speech pattern from another, the researcher is forced to call each type of disfluency "stuttering." This lumping together of different phenomena cannot help but cloud the perception of the researcher and make it virtually impossible to generate reliable data on stuttering because *what* is being studied (i.e., stuttering) has not been clearly defined.

This situation is due in part to the paucity of language used to describe stuttering. Imagine if we were conducting a study on chameleons but instead of talking specifically about chameleons, we constantly referred to the subjects under observation only as reptiles. Of course, we would know what we were referring to, but someone else might be picturing another kind of reptile; snakes, for example, or iguanas. This couldn't help but be confusing. Yet, isn't that precisely what happens when we undertake investigations into the genetic cause of stuttering? We have four different kinds of stuttering, but we have only one word to distinguish between the four.

One way around this problem is to have separate words or phrases to differentiate the four kinds of disfluency. For example, I call first kind of stuttering *pathological disfluency* to identify the fractured speech that results when a person is suffering from a physical deficit such as a brain lesion or Parkinson's. The second is *developmental disfluency* which describes the speech of a child who is struggling to master the uncertainties of communication. The third kind of stuttering is *bobulating* (a coined word), the effortless, stumbling disfluency characteristic of the person who is emotionally upset or discombobulated. Finally, there is *blocking* where the person has locked up and is unable to speak.

By substituting these words for "stuttering," it is possible to be clear about the issue under observation. These distinctions, however, are usually

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not made when researchers conduct their studies, so when they say “We’re looking into the genetic cause of stuttering,” it’s really not clear how their investigative studies are being directed.

Yet another problem overlooked by researchers is that chronic stuttering is actually a compound problem. It is comprised of (1) the speech block and (2) what the individual does to break through or avoid the block (see diagram on page 102). Therefore, if you want to carry out meaningful research, you have to decide what part of the problem you’re going to study; that is, you have to observe it in its most elemental form.

To draw an analogy, let’s say your car develops an intermittent problem when you start it up in the morning, and after several frustrating days, you finally bring it in to Gunnart, the local auto mechanic. Gunnart does a thorough examination and calls you the next day with a diagnosis.

“Well...?” you ask.

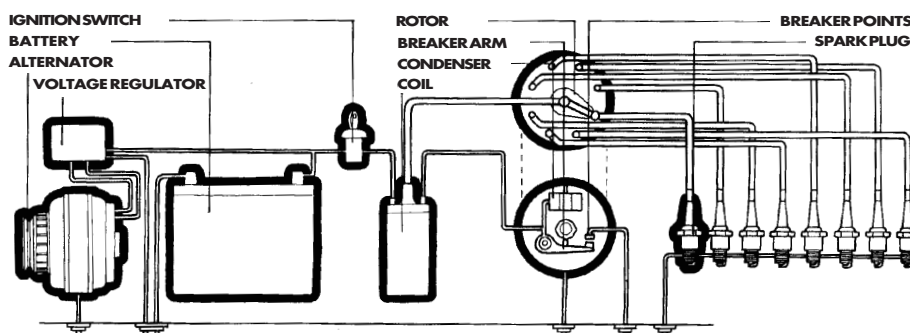
“It’s the ignition system,” Gunnart reports.

That’s a relief,” you think. “Now we’ve solved the problem.”

Or have you?

Here is a diagram of your car’s ignition system.

#### THE IGNITION SYSTEM



Because the ignition system is a *system*, it is, by definition, composed of more than one part. Thus, although you know *in general* where the problem lies, Gunnart has to do a lot more investigating before he can tell you *specifically* where the problem resides.

Yet, most research into the possible genetic causes of stuttering does not follow the same logical approach that Gunnart does in diagnosing your car. It does not break down chronic stuttering into its components but looks instead at the whole system as if it were a single unitary problem.

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**ASSUMPTION #2: WE CAN ACCURATELY IDENTIFY WHEN A PERSON IS BLOCKED.**

Some time ago I mentioned to a speech pathologist that I had grown up with a chronic stuttering problem, and that I'd struggled with it more or less for 30 years, but now I was fully recovered. She nodded her head abstractly as I told her this, and then confided that she could tell I was a stutterer because she could still see traces of it in my occasional disfluencies.

That was news to me. My definition of chronic stuttering is pretty straightforward. If my speech is blocked so that I cannot *spontaneously* move beyond a particular word or sound, then I have a problem. (Not something I experience anymore.) If, on the other hand, my speech is occasionally stumbly but I'm feeling no resistance to speaking and am not even aware of these minor bobulations, then I don't have a problem. The difference between my speech now and forty years ago is that I don't block.

No block, no problem.

Yet, most researchers fail to make this distinction, and therefore, they end up mixing apples and oranges. For example, a woman who says, "I-I-I-I-I can't make it over tonight" and stumbles on the word "I" because she's upset about letting someone down may sound exactly like the woman who repeats the word "I" because she fears she won't be able to say the word "can't." In one case the speaker is uncertain, embarrassed, discombobulated; in the other instance, she's blocked. Yet the researcher will call both of these speech patterns "stuttering."

Or let's take another example. One person's fluent speech is totally spontaneous while the other individual is constantly substituting to avoid her blocks. Yet, the researcher will call both of those people "fluent."

Do researchers make these distinctions? Generally not. If someone manifests disfluencies, they stutter. If not, they don't. The researcher doesn't measure the person's subjective experience to find out what's really going on. Therefore, it is difficult to know the meaning of whatever findings come to light.

**ASSUMPTION #3: ONLY GENETIC FACTORS CAN BE TRANSMITTED FROM ONE GENERATION TO ANOTHER.**

It is such a logical assumption. The stutterer purses his lips, but no sound emerges. He becomes caught in a repetitive cycle of "ra-ra-ra-ra-ra" before "report" shoots from his mouth like an errant missile. Surely, there is some mechanical or nervous problem that is impeding his speech,

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and surely, that problem has deep genetic roots. How else could we explain that these behaviors are often present in families from one generation to another.

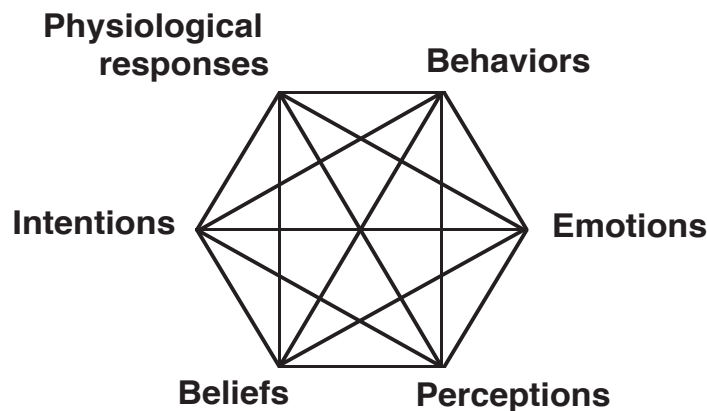
Yet, as we have seen in the long-standing animosity between Serbs and ethnic Albanians, attitudes and beliefs, too, can be passed from grandfather to father to son.

But what do they have to do with stuttering? And if attitudes and beliefs are in fact major contributing factors, why have we never considered them?

We have not considered them because our thinking has been paralyzed by an out-of-date paradigm. The old paradigm says that stuttering is a unitary problem driven by genetic factors. Thus, our perceptions and beliefs are seen only as outgrowths of our stuttering. They are not also seen as causal agents.

In the new paradigm, chronic stuttering is not understood as a unitary problem but a *system* with six key components in a dynamic relationship in which *each point of the system affects and is affected by all the other points*. It is not the components by themselves that create the problem but the dynamic moment-by-moment interaction of these six components that brings to life the stuttering behavior.

## THE STUTTERING HEXAGON



For example, when the person wants to ask a stranger on the street “Do you have the time?” and gets caught on tuh-tuh-tuh-tuh-tuh-tuh, there are a number of forces at work. Let’s examine some of the components that make up this system.

We’ll begin by looking at the challenge of stopping a stranger to ask a question. The stutterer is aware of totally obsessing on his fear of saying “time.” He believes he will block, and the feared word is adding to his fight-or-flight reaction. But is this the only thing triggering his

response? Not likely. There is also the issue of encountering a stranger. Who is this person? What does she look like? What is at risk? Is she pretty, and does he feel “worthy” enough to talk to her? How will he respond? What is he projecting into the encounter?

What about the momentary flick of her eye before she actually looks at him. Is she annoyed? Afraid? In a hurry? Does she resent being stopped by a perfect stranger? How does he interpret all this?

Does he feel he has to talk perfectly? Or be perfect? Does he have a preconceived idea of how he wants her to respond? Suppose she doesn’t follow his script? Is it a trigger for more panic?

What about his response threshold? Is he highly sensitive? Is he quick to initiate a fight-or-flight response? Is he inclined to overreact? Is he having a good day emotionally? Is he feeling positive and confident, or insecure or dejected? The stutterer’s beliefs and how he interprets his perceptions will have an enormous impact on his feelings.

Many of the forces that bring to bear on the moment have nothing to do with fear of stuttering per se but with his response to the environment. However, because these forces usually operate outside of his awareness, the only thing he may be conscious of is his fear about his speech.

#### *ASSUMPTION #4: YOU CAN DO MEANINGFUL RESEARCH WITHOUT HAVING A CLEAR IDEA OF WHAT YOU’RE LOOKING FOR.*

All investigations into the genetic causes of stuttering seem to have one thing in common—the researchers don’t have a credible theory behind their study. In other words, they don’t specifically know what they’re looking for. This curious situation rises because for many and perhaps most researchers, stuttering is an ill-defined speech anomaly whose very definition seems to be rooted in the unknown. But, says William Perkins, Professor Emeritus, University of Southern California and former Director of the Stuttering Center at USC, if you want to do *meaningful* research, you must start out with a credible theory and then use a methodology to test predictions that are derived from that theory.

In the January/February 1997 issue of the NSA newsletter *Letting GO*, Perkins develops this point further:

*Since the advancement of theories of stuttering is looked down upon as speculation, investigators are left in an odd position. Here they sit with all this high powered equipment. But they don’t have any scientifically rational theory to use it on that predicts cause and effect. Instead, stuttering research has been*

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*akin to trawling a net behind a boat to see what you pick up. It's undertaken with the idea that if only you can just gather enough data, then the cause of stuttering will become apparent....*

*In fact, most research does not even focus on stuttering directly, but on conditions associated with stuttering. This is especially true of neurological studies, which have rarely been used to challenge theories. Like other research, it has only been used to find support for ideas.*

*One of the foundations of science is that a theory must account for all defining characteristics, [and it is this that] is perhaps most responsible for perpetuating the belief that stuttering is unsolvable. Here's why.*

*Virtually all research intended for understanding stuttering involves groups of subjects—in fact, the larger the group the better. On the face of it, this seems sensible. With a single subject or small group, results cannot be applied with confidence to the stuttering population in general.*

*But in group studies, how a particular person speaks is ignored in favor of numerical group averages for pauses, disfluencies, etc. This means that group results probably do not describe any individual in a study. This would not pose a problem if all those who stutter were alike. But groups do not stutter. Individuals stutter. And the causes of their stuttering vary from one-person to the next.*

*It is only after individual causes are understood that group research can be productive in helping to find out how widespread these causes are among the stuttering population.*

*But to start with group research?*

*That's a guarantee that the core of stuttering will never be solved with this approach.*

The only thing that researchers seem to be able to determine is that *something* is happening in certain parts of the brain when an individual stutters. But what it is, and what effect it may or may not have in creating stuttering remains totally speculative. Yet, the fact that something *is* happening does not discourage researchers from confidently asserting that there are genetic factors that cause stuttering. Otherwise, they say, these responses would not be present to a greater statistical degree in families that have a history of stuttering. But whether these are *causal* factors or by-products of other events associated with stuttering is not something they are able to determine.

Finally, since stuttering does *not* appear in the family histories of 75% of people who stutter, how can we claim that stuttering is genetically driven? What other maladies that *have* been proven to be genetically determined show such a low statistical presence within the families transmitting the problem?

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## *WHERE DOES THAT LEAVE US GENETICS-WISE?*

From my own experiences as a recovered stutterer, as well as from more than 33 years of active involvement in the stuttering self-help movement, I have observed that stuttering seems to be a problem in which six key elements—emotions, perceptions, beliefs, intentions, physiological responses, and physical behaviors—interact and form a self-perpetuating, behavioral system.

Several parts of the system can, in fact, be transmitted from parent to child—namely, perceptions and beliefs about life, proper behavior, and what one should expect from others. These are elements that travel effectively through time and undoubtedly contribute to the higher incidence of stuttering in certain families.

There is, however, a genetic component that I'm sure does play a role in stuttering. It does not relate to speech directly, but to how the individual relates to stress. It is something that can be passed along in the genetic make-up of certain families. It has to do with the part of the brain which is most responsible for storing emotional memory.

## *A DISCOVERY*

One summer while I was in college, I worked in the mail room of my father's advertising agency. In the mail room was a black phone that connected directly to the photostat house several blocks away. Twice, maybe three times a day, one of the art directors from upstairs would call down and ask me to phone up the stat house and ask for a pickup.

I lived in terror of that phone since I invariably blocked on the letter "p." Usually, the first request for a pickup happened about mid-afternoon, after I'd had a good part of the day to worry about it, so when I finally had to make the call, my nerves were a mess. Even so, my natural stubbornness would fill me with resolve. This time, I vowed, I'd say "pickup" without resorting to a starter sound, like "um," or "ah," or starter words like, "Yeah, could you make a pickup." And each time I'd chicken out when the gruff voice at the other end answered.

One morning I showed up at the office feeling especially good. At about 10 o'clock, the first call came down to order a pickup. Since it came so early, I hadn't had much time to worry about it. I decided to really go for broke and say "pickup" without any kind of "cheating." I picked up the phone.

The voice said, "Hello."

Hurling headlong into the experience, I took a deep breath and said, "Pickup." I did not use a starter word. I did not block. I kept my throat and

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lips relaxed. At that moment I was startled by an enormous rush of feeling, a panic reaction such as I had not experienced before.

"Wow!" I thought as I replaced the handset. "Where did that come from?" I felt I had discovered what was behind the speech block, and what would happen if I *didn't* block or avoid the word. I discovered that I had been preventing myself from experiencing an overwhelming sense of panic.

I had never known that these feelings were lurking there until that moment. It turned out to be an enormously useful revelation. Fear of being overwhelmed by a sudden rush of feeling has gone a long way to explain to me what a speech block is all about, and my beliefs were validated by the years of work I did in personal growth programs. The more I became comfortable with expressing my emotions, the less inclination there was to block.

This is not to say that chronic stuttering is *caused* by the suppression of unwanted feelings. But I *am* saying that a holding back of feeling seems to be an important component of the total stuttering system.

To gain a better understanding of this, it is useful to know something about the functioning of a part of the brain called the amygdala.

## *THE ROLE OF THE AMYGDALA*

The amygdala is an almond-shaped cluster of interconnected structures perched above the brainstem, near the bottom of the limbic ring, that acts as a storehouse of emotional memory. It is one of the most primitive parts of the brain, evolving hundreds of thousands of years before the development of the cerebral cortex where rational thought takes place.

The original role of the amygdala was to ensure that animals would have particularly vivid memories of what threatens or pleases them. Like a neural tripwire, whenever the animal was threatened, the amygdala would send urgent messages to every major part of the brain to trigger the secretion of the body's fight-or-flight hormones, activate the cardiovascular system, and prepare the muscles for action. Thus, if primitive man heard a deep growl and a rustle of grass, the hair-trigger response of his amygdala would marshal him to take action before the marauding predator could take him by surprise.

Though modern man has developed a highly evolved cerebral cortex capable of abstract thinking, the amygdala still occupies a favored position, and in the event of an emotional emergency, either physical or social, the amygdala will effectively hijack the rest of the brain, including the rational mind. Thus, if you've been unfortunate enough to have been hit by a race car while you were a spectator at a TransAm event (as happened to my wife some years ago), the sound of screeching brakes on a city street is enough

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to trigger an instant fight-or-flight reaction. In fact, the amygdala can often trigger an emotional response before the cortical centers have fully understood what is happening—as if our emotions have a mind of their own which operates independently of our rational mind.

In the best selling book, *Emotional Intelligence*, by Daniel Goleman (must reading for anyone who stutters), the author notes that some people are born with a neurochemistry that makes this circuit easily aroused. For example, says Goleman, highly sensitive people “may have inherited chronically high levels of norepinephrine or other brain chemicals that activate the amygdala and so create a new threshold of excitability, making the amygdala more easily triggered.”

In her book *The Highly Sensitive Person*, Elaine Aron reports that 20 percent of the general population can be considered highly sensitive and are thus more affected by people, events and environmental factors. So what about the stuttering community? Are there genetic differences in this area? It would seem so according to a study done by Dr. Libby Oyler for her Ph.D. dissertation in speech pathology. In an article that ran in the April 1998 edition of “Letting GO,” the monthly newsletter of the National Stuttering Association, Oyler reported that 84 percent of all PWS studied showed a higher level of sensitivity than did non-stutterers. This would suggest that some children would be more impacted by a subtle change in tone of voice, a gesture, a momentary expression or other nonverbal form of communication. So while a child may not have a “stuttering gene” *per se*, he or she might have the high reactivity that contributes to the development of the Stuttering Hexagon.

If one wishes to conduct research into the impact of genetic factors on chronic stuttering, it might therefore be much more productive to look into the individual’s sensitivity to the environment and his or her responsiveness to threatening events than into the systems associated with speech production *per se*...but always with the caveat that it is not the high level of excitability *per se* that causes chronic stuttering. After all, there are many people who don’t stutter who manifest the same symptoms. It is the overexcitability *in combination with* the other elements of the Stuttering Hexagon that work together to create the speech block.

## SUMMARY

As the former editor of *Letting GO*, I would regularly receive requests from researchers who asked that we run their announcement soliciting subjects for their latest study into the genetic cause of stuttering. I was

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always happy to oblige. But I cannot help but feel these investigations are destined to come up with findings that are inconclusive and of little practical value. Here's why I think so:

1. Researchers treat stuttering as if it were a specific, clearly defined phenomenon, whereas most of us don't even agree on what the word "stuttering" means, let alone what is actually going on when a person locks up and cannot move his speech forward.

2. Scientists conducting genetic studies look at stuttering as if it were a unitary problem, whereas chronic stuttering is better defined as a combination of a speech block and the strategy to break through or avoid the block. Because it is a compound problem, researchers would be better served by studying the most elemental component, the speech block, rather than lumping the block together with the coping strategies.

3. Most researchers look only at the presence of conspicuous disfluencies to determine whether or not a person is stuttering, but people who bobulate when excited are not necessarily having any conscious speech difficulty per se. A classic example of misidentifying chronic stuttering took place several years ago on the *Marilu* show on TV where the invited guests were either speech-language pathologists or people dealing with their own stuttering. Actor Gordon Clapp was also invited on the show to talk about his sympathetic portrayal of a character with a stuttering problem on the TV drama *NYPD Blue*. Clapp was even acknowledged as a hero by one NSA member in the audience for being a positive role model for stutterers. Lt. Medavoy, the New York detective played by Clapp, does in fact display occasional disfluencies, but there are none of the struggle behaviors or the self-consciousness normally associated with blocked speech. Nor did Clapp ever even consider stuttering as a problem when he was fleshing out his character. I've always felt that the actor was somewhat mystified by his presence on the *Marilu* show.

4. Researchers assume that only genetic factors can be transmitted intergenerationally, but attitudes and beliefs can also run in families. The reason why these have not been considered as contributing factors is the narrow paradigm used to define chronic stuttering. When you look at stuttering as something that is constructed of ordinary building blocks, however, then attitudes and beliefs become causal agents and you no longer have to resort to genetics to explain why chronic stuttering often runs in families.

Even so, there probably are genetic factors that relate to chronic stuttering, but they do so indirectly. These have to do with the degree of sensitivity of the individual and the level of responsiveness in reacting to stress, factors that can be passed along from parent to child.

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5. Finally, research into the genetic causes of stuttering traditionally involves “trawling” for answers. It is not based on a credible theory. The researcher often has no idea what he’s looking for. He just hopes that something interesting shows up, but what it could mean is highly speculative.

I’m well aware that this essay is likely to prove unpopular with anyone engaged in genetic research on stuttering. However, rather than establishing an adversarial relationship, I hope that the points I’ve raised are cause for reflection and perhaps offer a clearer definition of objectives.

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## THE SCIENCE OF FLUENCY

by Anna Margolina, Ph.D.

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“**W**hy do you laugh so often?”

This was the question that John Harrison asked me during one of our first conversations over Skype. I wasn’t even aware that I had this habit. But then I started paying attention and soon realized that he was right. It seemed that this small nervous laugh was coming out every time the content of my speech became too emotional. I had no idea how to express my emotions, so I masked them with a laugh.

I contacted John Harrison soon after I discovered and promptly devoured his book *Redefining Stuttering*. At this time I was a mess. I had poor control over my speech – my voice would easily become high pitched (something I also wasn’t aware of, until John commented on this) and my speech rate was often too fast. This speeded-up speech was frequently punctuated with painful struggles – blocking episodes that could last up to seven seconds (according to the official evaluation).

From time to time I would enter a speech block from which there was no escape, and then my struggle could last for a really long time. To make it even worse it was accompanied by strong facial contractions, eye squeezing, cheek puffing and other involuntary movements. Even one such episode could ruin any pleasant memory, such as having a party with my friends. Instead of remembering all the happy moments, I would ruminate over the time when I couldn’t deliver a punch line, thus turning an attempt to tell a joke into an embarrassing experience. I imagined, of course, that everybody at the table remembered my blocks as long as I did.

### *UPS AND DOWNS OF THE RECOVERY PROCESS*

For someone who stuttered for almost 40 years I was blissfully ignorant. My knowledge about stuttering could be easily summed with just one phrase, “It is incurable.” This phrase had been repeated over and over by many therapists, and it became imbedded in my mind. But as soon as this belief was shattered by many real-life examples of successful

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recovery from stuttering, there was nothing left that would prevent me from absorbing new ideas.

At first, inspired by the book *Redefining Stuttering*, I started experimenting with my speech on my own, but soon realized that it might take too long. I was too emotionally involved with my stuttering, there were too many issues attached to it. I felt lost in the jungle. I needed a guide and a coach. John Harrison, as someone who was able to overcome his own stuttering, seemed a perfect candidate.

As we progressed with our investigation of my speaking habits, I accumulated more and more evidence of my tendency to hold back and block while I spoke. To allow emotions to emerge, John advised me to slow down my speech and pause often. Soon I noticed that slowing down my speech and coloring it with emotions led to more fluency, since it allowed me to stay in touch with myself. I still had plenty of stuttering episodes in my speech, but it became easier to manage my hard blocking.

In addition to having sessions with John Harrison, I also started sessions with NLP practitioner Bob Bodenhamer, author of the book *Mastering Blocking and Stuttering*. I had a suspicion that my tendency to block my emotions was rooted in my childhood memories. After one of the sessions, something clicked, and I suddenly started speaking with amazing fluency.

However, I soon discovered that the recovery process wasn't as smooth as it seemed initially. It had its ups and downs. For about four weeks I spoke with a freedom and flow that I had never imagined was possible. Then, one day I had a minor block and after that I had a dream in which I stuttered just as badly as I did before. When I woke up, I felt tension in my throat, and that day I had some minor blocking. It was at this point that I remembered John's advice to slow down and try to express my emotions as freely as possible in order to regain fluency. Even though my stuttering remained very mild and occurred only in some situations, I yearned for the state of effortless fluency I had tasted and couldn't forget.

## *THE KEY TO FLUENCY*

As I kept practicing my art of slow and expressive speech, first with John, then in Toastmasters and finally in my clown and acting class (in which I enrolled with the goal of exploring my silly and expressive side), I kept trying to find the key to the state of free flowing fluency. It seemed that this state had distinct characteristics. Words gently rolled from my tongue. I didn't plan what to say. The moment I knew what word I was saying was the moment I said it. I wasn't listening to my speech or monitoring it. I was going with the flow.

It was easy for me to see how different the stuttering state was, because

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it occurred so rarely now. When stuttering, I'd suddenly become self-conscious. I'd become aware of the word I was going to say, and I was sure that on this word I would block. Sometimes I did, and sometimes I was able to avoid it by slowing down and trying to speak with more expression.

This was something I had no explanation for. How could it be that I would become fluent, then get some of my stuttering back, and then again become more fluent? And what was it about slow and expressive speech that made even my stuttering state more fluent?

All this occurred in 2010 around the time the media created a big fuss about the discovery of "stuttering genes." Many journalists hailed this research as the one that finally solved "the mystery of stuttering" and made all other theories obsolete!

To my dismay, this ignited fierce discussions on whether John Harrison, Bob Bodenhamer and others who help people who stutter to regain more fluency could really do them any good, or whether they just fostered unrealistic dreams from which a devastating fall to the harsh and sobering reality would inevitably follow.

## *LOOKING FOR ANSWERS*

To me all this talk about stuttering being genetic and therefore incurable held little interest because of my newfound fluency. It was something that no other method of therapy had ever given me. But since I had a medical and biological education as well as a Ph.D. in biology, I became curious as to how the existence of genetic anomalies associated with stuttering might fit into John Harrison's hexagon theory of stuttering. There was certainly a place for it because one of the points on the hexagon was labeled "physiological responses." I knew that physiological responses could be influenced by genetics, but I wanted more understanding.

The main obstacle on the way to understanding was my lack of specific knowledge in the area of brain research. However, I could grasp the general ideas, and I could see whether the proposed theory could be applied to everything I observed in my own recovery process. My goal was to find something that I could use not only to explain changes in my speech, but also to design a strategy to deal with occasional blocking episodes as well as to make sure that my old way of blocking doesn't return.

From the genetic studies it appeared that there were some families in which stuttering occurred more frequently (although this wasn't the case with me.) Also, an analysis of a large family from Pakistan showed that many stuttering individuals of this family had a mutation in the gene

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*GNPTAB*. But three stuttering persons from this family did *not* have this mutation and apparently stuttered for a different reason.

Even more intriguing was the fact that 11 subjects from the same family had one or two copies of this mutation, but “currently didn’t stutter” (it was not clear from the article whether or not they stuttered before). This mutation was also found in two unrelated stuttering subjects from Pakistan as well as in one who didn’t stutter. However, none of the studied PWS of North American-British origin had this mutation even though they all had a family history of stuttering (one person who had this mutation turned out to be of Asian-Indian heritage). If we are talking about something as universal as stuttering, we certainly cannot pin our hopes on a mutation that appears only in certain nationalities.

Two other mutations were in genes *GNPTG* and *NAGPA*; however, none of those mutations were found in any of the Pakistani PWS who were studied. Well, maybe these mutations were very common among North-American PWS? It didn’t appear to be true either. Among 270 unrelated North American-British PWS only a few had this mutation. Four persons had mutation in *GNPTG* gene and six persons (all of the European descent) had mutations in *NAGPA* gene (total frequency for both mutations – less than 3%). The researchers didn’t find mutations in these genes in the control subjects, which led them to claim that the mutations they found were the cause of stuttering.

For me, that conclusion seemed too big a jump.

First of all, researchers selected only those PWS who had a distinct family history of stuttering; therefore, it remained unknown how frequently those mutations occur in the rest of the PWS population. Secondly, what about those individuals who stuttered as children, but later recovered? What about those who gained fluency as adults?

Probably the most intriguing finding in this study was that all of the above-mentioned mutations affected certain enzymes found in lysosomes – waste disposal stations of the cells. However, it remained unclear how exactly those mutations interfered with fluent speech. What specifically did they change in the brain?

Because of the lack of available genetic mapping of the human brain, researchers used maps for the mouse brain and discovered that genes *GNPTG* and *NAGPA* were expressed predominantly in the areas responsible for emotional processing and motor coordination. As the authors pointed out “a person’s emotional state can exert a strong effect on the severity of stuttering.” [1] I can’t agree more.

Yet another genetic study featured an individual from Brazil with complex speech/language problems including stuttering who had a mutation in a completely different gene - *CNTNAP2* – which was a gene

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associated with various speech/language pathology and autism.[2] Also, a different mutation, this time in gene DRD2, was found in some Han Chinese PWS.[3]

All in all, those genetic studies suggested that in a very limited number of cases, people who stutter had a genetic condition that in some obscure way might be affecting their speech production. But it is still unclear what aspects of speech production are affected by genetics, since most people who stutter can speak fluently under some circumstances. Also, since there are many who stuttered but were able to gain a significant degree of fluency, it is unlikely that any of those mutations can cause direct interruption of speech flow.

### *THE MYSTERY OF THE STUTTERING BRAIN*

Brain imaging allowed scientists to accumulate a load of data about “the stuttering brain”. At the first glance the science seemed very convincing – there were indeed some distinct differences in the grey and in the white matter observed in the brain of those who stuttered. However, these differences were much less noticeable in the brain of children aged 9-12 years compared to the adult PWSs brain. For example, children of 9-12 years of age didn’t have any of the right hemisphere asymmetry that is found in the adults who stutter. [4].

According to the researchers, it was technically impossible to perform this study on younger children – in other words, on those who were at the very onset of stuttering. But those who participated in the study already had several years of stuttering behind them that occurred in their most formative years. It seemed like the brain of 9-12 year old children who stuttered occupied an intermediate position – it looked like it was still changing.

What was changing it? Were these differences the cause of stuttering or the consequences of it?

It is well known now that the brain, even in adults, is plastic and undergoes structural changes. For example, a famous study of London taxi drivers’ brains showed enlargement of the brain area responsible for navigation [4]. Surely if driving a taxi for a few years can change your brain, speaking with stuttering for several decades could do this, too.

Furthermore, there is substantial evidence that various interventions can elicit structural changes in the brain.

### *STRUCTURAL CHANGES*

For example, it was found that assisted recovery from stuttering with the

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help of a professional actually caused changes in the structure of the brain compared to the unassisted (spontaneous) recovery in adults. It is worth mentioning that unassisted recovery was associated with deeper healing compared to recovery following medical treatment. For example, those who recovered on their own as adults didn't have the white matter anomaly observed in people who stutter, although they retained some differences in grey matter. Nevertheless, those differences, whatever their cause, apparently did not prevent those people from speaking fluently [5].

Still, all this science couldn't explain the changes I observed in my own speech. If my stuttering was caused by genes or a brain anomaly, what happened to all those factors when I started speaking fluently? Did they go on vacation? Did they take a really long nap and then wake up to nag me some more?

## *THE SCIENCE OF FLUENCY*

In 2011, I came across a fascinating article, which shed light on this issue. The article titled "Simulation of Feedback and Feedforward Control in Stuttering" discussed the possibility that stuttering was caused by a different method of quality control in fluent people than in those who stuttered. [7]

The authors focused on two primary methods of speech control in the human brain – feedback and feedforward.

Feedback requires constant auditory monitoring of produced speech. Such monitoring is crucial for language development. An infant first listens to the sounds of speech, all the while building a sound database in the brain. Then the infant starts babbling and producing a wide range of sounds that are matched to stored sounds in the brain.

Every time an error is detected, the position of articulators is corrected and the new sound is matched to the "correct answer." Such error-based monitoring allows an infant to adjust movements of the tongue, jaws and lips to the point when they can produce the correct sound.

The same probably happens with grammatical structures. As a child speaks, his or her brain detects mismatch errors in the sentences structure and adjusts signals accordingly.

But fluent speech requires a different method of control, called *feedforward* due to its high rate and complexity. This type of control is the prerequisite for fluency and is not error-based. The brain monitors signals (commands) as they are sent to the articulators with only a minimal control of the result. The commands are so well learned that they can be trusted to produce the result without constant checking for errors.

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According to the authors, the sequence in this model is as follows:

1. Tune feedback control system during babbling (self generated speech sounds),
2. Learn an auditory target, when a new sound sample is present,
3. Learn a feedforward command for the sound by practicing its production.

The authors hypothesize that in people who stutter, feedforward control is weak, so feedback remains the dominant form of speech control. They note that stuttering usually starts around the time that children start switching from feedback to feedforward mode.

However, in my opinion the authors missed a good opportunity to discuss what factors other than genetics or brain abnormalities could prevent or delay a normal transition to the feedforward mode of control.

Using a computerized model of speech production, the authors showed that extensive errors detected by the feedback mechanism may cause the system to reset and repeat the sound.

They also demonstrated that feedback control can be cancelled by the introduction of white noise. White noise makes auditory feedback impossible and encourages a reliance on feedforward control. This phenomenon has been long known and is used in some fluency enhancing devices. The loud noise prevents those who stutter from hearing their own voice. In most cases masking out the person's speech magically extinguishes stuttering.

The authors believe that their theory also explains why stuttering more often occurs in the beginning of the speech or word. Feedback control is useless if speech has not even started yet and attempts to monitor something that isn't there may result in a perceived "block".

(I imagine this as hesitation that occurs when someone who is not very physically fit needs to jump a wide crack. If you jumped many cracks before, you can just do it. But if you are unsure where your feet land and you know that you have no way to control this after you make the jump, you may feel pretty much blocked.)

This idea confirmed my own observation that fluent speech *feels different* from stuttered speech. It also seemed to agree with John Harrison's article, "Zen in the Art of Fluency," in which he compared fluent speech with the effortless but precise performance of Zen archers, who could hit the target without consciously aiming.

This also agreed with what I learned in my acting class – namely that a performer must be able to abandon self-consciousness and be fully immersed in the flow of the moment to prevent "choking" on stage.

In short, when we start watching for errors, we are more likely to trip.

But I failed to see why the authors believed that such overreliance on

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feedback could only be a result of some brain anomaly. For example, it is known that feedforward control is crucial in sports, since athletes often must be able to act automatically. Such automatic action requires many hours of practice. When enough trust in the ability to perform the skill is built, the athlete can let it go and switch to the automatic mode.

However, if a traumatic accident or a brutal failure occurs before such transition is made, the switch to automatic mode may never happen.

Thus it seems very probable that when parents or teachers draw a child's attention to his or her "stutter" (which naturally occurs in the large percentage of children), they add new sinister meaning to any minor hesitations or repetitions in the speech. This lack of trust in one's own abilities can halt the transition to the feedforward mode of speech control.

### *LETTING GO OF CONTROL*

In the Academy Award-winning movie "The King's Speech", there is a scene in which Lionel (the therapist) keeps annoying his patient, King George VI of England, until the king explodes. In his angry outburst the king suddenly speaks fluently. This scene reminded me of my own experience, where the initial onset of strong emotions was accompanied by an increase of blocking, however, after reaching some threshold, (i.e.: if I exploded and "blew off the roof"), my speech would then become perfectly fluent.

Why?

Because at that point I stopped caring about the consequences.

Many PWS report that strong emotions make them uncomfortable and they tend to suppress those emotions rather than express them. Since voice is a vehicle for emotions, the perceived need to control one's emotions may typically lead to overreliance on feedback control in speech.

### *THE ISSUE OF TRUST*

Another possible reason for not trusting yourself is fear of negative reaction. For example, if a husband returns home late and his wife asks him "Where have you been?" – a question for which he hasn't a good answer – he will tend to hold back and speak very carefully. In the same way, a child who is frequently unsure whether or not his or her words or actions will bring the hammer down on them may also exhibit a heightened degree of control in speech. In fact, there can be many factors that prevent a child from making a timely transition to feedforward control.

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Because of robust adaptive mechanisms of young children, however, a transition to feedforward control may still occur spontaneously. High rates (80%) of recovery from stuttering in childhood indicate a rather wide window of opportunity when natural switching to feedforward mode is still possible. But if the need to remain in feedback mode grows deep and strong roots, the switch to feedforward control becomes difficult to accomplish.

I don't dismiss the possibility that there could be some physiological reasons why for some people it may be difficult to develop feedforward control or why their feedforward control crushes under stress, but to me it doesn't seem a requirement. Especially for individuals who can speak fluently under some circumstances, there appear to be plenty of other explanations.

For example, if you were often criticized and disapproved in your childhood, you may carry "the judge" with you all the time and feel the need to monitor your performance. This can explain why choral reading and speaking to animals often bring fluency. They remove "the judge" from the equation. It is fairly hard to imagine your dog being critical of your speech. And in the chorus, you are just a voice among many others. Many people do not stutter when they are speaking to themselves. On the other hand, some people do stutter even when they are alone, because even in the privacy of their solitude they cannot stop themselves from being their own judge.

Fear of certain "difficult" sounds also encourages feedback control, because you never let go of control as long as you have red flags all over the alphabet.

## *WHAT ABOUT ME?*

Since I spoke fluently after NLP sessions, I knew I didn't have anything that physically prevented me from using feedforward control in my speech, except for my reluctance to let it go and except for the lack of practice of doing so in everyday situations. I supposed that what happened after the memorable session with Bob Bodenhamer when I started speaking fluently was my sudden realization that I did not have to monitor my speech anymore and that I could trust my ability to speak.

The profound healing of childhood hurts allowed me to reframe the experiences that had triggered distrust in my ability to simply let go and speak. Similarly it removed the need to constantly monitor my speech for errors.

I suddenly realized that my belief that I never would be able to speak normally wasn't based on anything but empty words heard in childhood. I realized that my fear of stuttering was irrelevant to my current adult life

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and that some negative experiences that I had with my speech in childhood could have been caused by problems in my speech for reasons other than stuttering.

Did I speak too fast? Did I swallow word endings? Did my thoughts follow a rambling and wild pattern that no one could follow? I do not know, and I am not going to search for answers. But I had a strong feeling that whatever it was, as an adult, I did not have to fear something that haunted me in my childhood.

This positive reframing removed an invisible barrier that was preventing my feedforward mechanism (the system for automatic control of speech) from taking over. And when that happened, fluent speech followed.

I have found, however, that progress seldom follows a completely linear path. One day I had an unanticipated block, which opened a gate for an old distrust to creep in. More distrust followed a dream in which I had a vivid image of myself resuming my heavy blocking. The result was the return of some blocking due to resumed feedback control of my speech. But since I didn't have the same reaction to blocking that I had before the NLP sessions, and since I deliberately slowed down my speech rate, thus reducing the possibility for errors, I had only mild disfluency and none of my previous heavy blocking.

## *A VISION FOR THE FUTURE*

When I look in the future, I see somewhere far ahead a comprehensive theory of stuttering developed in collaboration between neuro-scientists, behavioral specialists, psychologists and people who stutter. This theory would include the influence of individual history, consequences of growing up with stuttering, individual emotional makeup, as well as some neurophysiology and genetics. This theory will pretty much resemble John Harrison's hexagon and will present stuttering as a system with many interacting and interdependent components. But as this hasn't happened yet, I would like to make my small contribution and put in the center of John Harrison's hexagon two additional components:

- 1) An ability to activate and maintain feedforward speech control,
- 2) A level of an individual's reactivity to imperfections (real or perceived) in his or her speech.

Stuttering in a form of repetition and minor hesitations is more likely to occur when an individual speaks with a high degree of self-consciousness, constantly scanning his or her speech for errors. Such "stuttering" often appears in the speech of fluent speakers in moments of self-doubt and anxiety.

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However, people who stutter also have a high intolerance to any disturbances in their speech. And they have learned to counteract this by holding the breath and tensing vocal cords and other muscles involved in articulation. Such behavior results in more prominent and struggled blocks. An extensive “library” of difficult words and situations stored in the memory of most adult PWS makes it even more difficult to let go of control.

The fluent state achieved by a majority of the population without any effort resembles that of an athlete who is able to entrust his or her success to automatic, well-learned movements and paying little attention to minor flaws. If an athlete starts thinking “Oh, I fell down at this spot during the last game, what if I fall again today”, it will be a disaster. Therefore, they don’t do this.

Building this kind of trust, after keeping yourself in check for decades, is not easy. However it can be done. And even though for some people who stutter it may initially be necessary to increase control over their speech in order to learn new speaking patterns (such as speaking more slowly, using more efficient type of breathing etc), it is a natural fluency, a state of full immersion into the flow of conversation and letting go of control, that should be an ultimate goal.

At the moment this article is written, most of my speech is fluent, and by fluent I mean effortless carefree speech with very little control, which feels very enjoyable (in contrast to my past turmoil and anguish). However, I still experience some situations (although they are rare now) when I feel blocked. In those situations I slow down my tempo and try to re-capture the fluent state. Typically with very rare exceptions, I am able to jump back on the fluent tract and let go of the control.

To me fluency feels like a strong current that sweeps me and carries forward through the conversation with words rolling effortlessly wave-by-wave. It feels very good. I know that I might have had some issues with speech production when I was a small child - problems that could have made my surrounding too harsh on me and convinced me that I shouldn’t trust my ability to speak. That fear could have made it impossibly difficult to switch to unconscious control at the usual time.

But at present there is nothing that prevents me from speaking fluently.

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You can view several videos of Anna's Toastmaster speeches at these URLss:

May 15, 2009 "Quest for Fluency"

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j2XOifWF-0Q>

January 15, 2011, "John Harrison's Speaking Exercises"

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K0XAdT6cvy8>

May 2011, "Where Is the Raven"

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qAXJzOfnYDM>

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## ZEN IN THE ART OF FLUENCY

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One Sunday a few years ago we drove out to visit Rich and Marcia, some friends of ours who live on the other side of San Francisco Bay. Every time we visit I always end up playing ping-pong with Rich; however, this particular afternoon Rich's 14-year-old son, Andy, was home, and since Andy was supposed to be a pretty good player, Rich said why didn't I play him a few games. I said fine.

Andy was better than good. His defense was terrific, and to my chagrin, he beat the pants off me in the first game.

Throughout the game, I kept trying to slam the ball, but I was tight and uncoordinated, and all the balls went wild. Then we started the second game, and I found myself holding back and not slamming the way I was before. To be truthful I was worried about the humiliation of losing another game to a 14-year-old. I began to play it safe.

I was a quarter way into the game before I realized what I was doing. "Hold on, John," I thought to myself. "This isn't going to work. If you don't go all out, Andy's going to wipe the floor with you again, because he's just too good."

So I made a choice to live with my uncomfortability about losing to Andy and went back to slamming...and missing...and soon Andy was ahead again.

Then about half way through the game, something happened.

Perhaps my muscles had warmed up. Or perhaps I'd missed so many times that I no longer cared. Maybe it was a combination of both. Whatever the reasons, I felt a change. I was suddenly confident, accurate and in control. I began making backhand slams and forehand slams. I even slammed back Andy's serves. I added topspin, sidespin, backspin, and everything worked.

Poor Andy. From that point on he didn't have a chance.

I learned a lesson from that experience. I learned how important it was to say, "What the hell!" and not worry about the results. Had I given into my fear and tried to control my erratic swing, I might never had gotten my old game back. Overcontrolling my swing would have simply created more tightness and ruined my timing because I would have been imposing one set of controls on top of another.

Most of us who grow up with a stuttering problem see our speech blocks

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as threats—something we need to control. So instead of learning when to consciously focus on our technique and when to focus on the total experience of speaking, we focus on our technique exclusively.

Of course, it's important to recognize and correct improper speech mechanics. But at some point, we also have to learn when to shift our attention away from speech mechanics and onto the *feelings* of trust and release, even if this doesn't immediately deliver the desired results.

We need to follow the example of the Zen archers who are able to perform remarkable feats of skill, all seemingly without effort.

### *LESSONS FROM A ZEN MASTER*

The process of effortless performance is admirably described in the classic volume, *Zen in the Art of Archery*. The book was written in the early 1950's by Eugen Herrigel, a German philosopher who was invited to teach for several years at the University of Tokyo. Herrigel perceived his stay in Japan as a unique opportunity to get to know the country and its people, and especially, to develop a more intimate understanding of Buddhism and the "introspective practice of mysticism."

"For this much I had already heard," said Herrigel, "that there were in Japan a carefully guarded and living tradition of *Zen*; an art of instruction that had been tested over the centuries; and, most important of all, teachers of Zen astonishingly well versed in the art of spiritual guidance."

But the professor was informed that "it was quite hopeless for a European to attempt to penetrate into this realm of spiritual life—perhaps the strangest that the Far East has to offer—unless he began by learning one of the Japanese arts associated with Zen." So it was that Herrigel set out to find a master who could instruct him in the "artless art" of the Zen archer, and in due course, arranged with Zen Master Kenzo Awa to take him on as a student.

This short book is a fascinating account of Herrigel's struggles to acquire proficiency...the Zen way. The philosophy teacher describes the first demonstration in which Master Kenzo Awa "nocks" an arrow on the string, draws the bow, and seemingly without aiming, plunks the arrow squarely in the center of the target many yards away.

Herrigel is impressed. But how is such a feat achieved?

As Herrigel learns, to gain mastery, the Zen archer must stop *trying* to shoot the arrow correctly. He must detach himself from his results. He must learn to relax his body at precisely the moment he would normally be tensed, to draw the bow "spiritually" with a kind of effortless strength, and to "get out of his own way" so that his higher power can take over. When

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he is able to give over control to the “it”, the arrows unerringly find the bulls eye, even though the archer seems hardly to be taking aim.

This is easier said than done. To arrive at this level of mastery, the archer must be willing to shoot thousands of arrows that are wide of the mark without worrying about how he’s doing or trying to consciously control the flight of the arrow. If he does try to take conscious control, he will preempt and disable his higher powers and the experience of mastery will continue to elude him.

What particularly struck me as I read the book was how it takes Herrigel the better part of a year just to learn how to properly draw the bow. An indication of success is when the mysterious “it” draws the bow, unconsciously and effortlessly, and the professor is not even aware that this has taken place.

## *GIVING CONTROL TO THE HIGHER SELF*

The “it.” Some call it the higher self. Until recently, this has been a foreign concept to most westerners, although it has become increasingly familiar to many Californians who have been exploring eastern thinking since the 1960s.

One westerner who successfully translated these concepts into a contemporary setting is Tim Gallwey. His book, *The Inner Game of Tennis*, which became a best seller, applies the same Zen principles to the sport of tennis.

Gallwey's approach is to encourage you to move your conscious mind out of the way and simply visualize, relax, and allow your inner self to take control. The technique calls for the person to develop proficiency in the sport with little conscious effort or “trying”. The ideas expressed in *The Inner Game of Tennis* are a near perfect blueprint for the mindset required to speak fluently if you change every mention of “tennis” to “speaking.”

Another notable example of the Zen approach appeared in the late 60s in an article in *Sports Illustrated* about Lucky McDaniel, a riflery instructor in Georgia, whose students achieved remarkable results. McDaniel followed an unorthodox teaching method. Instead of starting people out with 22 caliber rifles, he started them out with pellet guns. This allowed the person to actually watch the pellet as it sped toward the target. The person was instructed not to aim, but simply to watch the target, quickly point and shoot, and see where the pellet went. Just keep doing it over and over.

Because the person could see the pellet, he could tell how far off he was and could make corrections on the next shot. By training his unconscious mind...his “it”...to do the shooting, the individual eventually got to the

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point where he could automatically hit the target with the pellet, seemingly without aiming. At this point the person would graduate to a 22 rifle with extraordinary results. The approach was extremely reminiscent of that demonstrated by the Zen archer.

How does all this relate to speech? Children automatically learn to speak the Zen way — not by consciously thinking about it, but by *feeling* their way through the process—by watching, doing, emulating, failing and trying again until it works. It is a process that bypasses the conscious mind. Speech is such a complicated undertaking, and must happen so quickly and automatically, that the Zen approach is really the *only* way it can be mastered and practiced. If you don't think so, just listen to any play-by-play sports-caster. Or listen to a simultaneous translator at work. There can be no deliberate control because there is no time to operate consciously. Like the Zen archer, the person simply reacts.)

Of course, children do struggle when they're first learning to speak, but they're not doing it in a self-conscious way. They're doing it with the same intuitive mind set as the Zen archery student who keeps drawing the bow and keeps drawing it and keeps drawing it and keeps drawing it and keeps drawing it until one day everything comes together and the process takes place automatically.\*

## *WHEN THE SYSTEM BREAKS DOWN*

Then what causes a child to become self-conscious about his speech and begin exercising deliberate control? I've observed three potential scenarios: (1) Self-consciousness can be triggered by speech blocks created when the child tries to assert himself while holding back his feelings (the classic approach-avoidance conflict). (2) Self-consciousness can be caused by speech blocks created by timing problems when the child tries to synchronize low-speed voluntary control of articulation with high-speed automatic vocal syllabic control. Or (3) self-consciousness can be caused by speech blocks created when the child anticipates a need to *try hard* to get the words out and initiates a valsalva maneuver, an act which is counterproductive to speech. Whichever scenario holds sway

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\* Anna Margolina, a friend from the neurosemanticsofstuttering Internet discussion group, describes this process as it is applied to playing a musical instrument: "First you learn how to position your fingers and play slowly, watching the result. But after many hours of practice you can let go, and you stop monitoring every sound. You just play. As one of the great musicians said, it is frightening to see hands flying down below and wonder whose hands they are and how they can do what they are doing. The same with speaking. First you babble, you learn how to talk, and then you let go and just say whatever you want to say. In this mode you shouldn't think about separate words that are coming. So you cannot have a thought - 'Oh, I will not be able to say this word.' You have just a stream of consciousness, and the words roll off your tongue."

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(and it could be any one or all three), the attempt to exercise control over a spontaneous act ends up disrupting the speaking process, leaving the child feeling helpless, panicked, and afraid of subsequent speaking situations.

Now the ironic twist. Just like the child learns to speak by following a Zen-like approach, so does he learn to employ behaviors that are detrimental to his speech using the same unconscious process. He does it the Zen way, repeating these behaviors over and over until they become automatic and outside his conscious awareness. It's when these unconscious controls interfere with the timing and spontaneity of speech (or when fear and panic operate outside the person's awareness to cause the person to hold everything back in a long, prolonged block) that they transform themselves into a chronic and self-sustaining problem.

As the child suffers the social consequences of malfunctioning speech, he changes how he feels about himself and others. He develops social strategies to protect himself from shame and embarrassment. He develops strategies for pushing out the difficult words, or hiding them. When these changes begin to influence and reinforce each other, the problem becomes self-perpetuating.

His reaction is similar to that of the professional golfer who, in trying very hard to sink an easy three foot putt to win the tournament, tightens up and jerks the putter to the left or right and blows his chance at glory. He then develops fears about little three foot putts. He starts to believe that he can't perform under pressure. His self-image changes to that of a loser and...well, you know the rest.

When therapy is limited to imposing a conscious set of controls on speech that is already overcontrolled by fears and expectations, the person simply ends up layering one level of controls on top of another. On the other hand, if the individual is willing to address the total system—looking not only at how he blocks as a speaker, but how he blocks as a *person*—he gradually becomes more willing to address the fears that hold him back.

As the person begins to develop a more realistic self-image, he can begin to relax and simply accept what shows up. This was what happened in the ping-pong game with Andy. I knew my swing was fine, because I had practiced it for many years. I simply had to decide to live with the consequences of letting go.

Similarly, the person who stutters must get his speech technique in order by becoming conscious of the subtle ways he interferes with the spontaneous act of speaking. Then he must shift his awareness from the mechanics of speaking to the total act of self-expression. He must decide to live with the consequences of letting go. Only then can his spontaneity be freely expressed as his higher self—his "it"—takes full command of the speaking process.

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## DISAPPEARING THE PROBLEM

There are, then, two different strategies for creating fluency. One is to constantly and consciously control the dysfluency. This is the strategy you find in many speech therapy programs. It does work, but people are often left with a sense of artificiality and feeling unreal and detached from their authentic self. ("Sure, the technique works when I use it, but I just don't feel like *me*.")

Certainly, one can attain a level of fluency through controlled speech, just like an archer can attain a certain level of skill by consciously drawing the bow. But in the same way that a consciously drawn bow prevents the student from attaining the effortlessness and accuracy of the Zen archer, so does consciously controlling one's speech prevent the person who stutters from ever attaining truly spontaneous self-expression. Irony of ironies, an insurmountable barrier is created by the very method introduced to cure the problem.

The alternative approach is to practice the proper speech mechanics, and then know when to "get out of your own way" and practice letting go. This is where visualization comes into play. Every time I sat in an audience and was held in the thrall of a dynamic speaker, I asked myself, "What is he feeling? What is the *experience* like for him?" How would I feel if, like him, I could actually have *fun* while I was speaking?" To help me get back to spontaneous speech, I developed an emotional picture of what letting go felt like and then practiced giving over control of my speech to that picture.

Anyone who's mastered a musical instrument already understands the need to let go and just *do it*. While you're first learning a composition, you may have a need to focus on the notes and the fingering. But when you give a recital, your attention must shift to the experience of putting it all together and expressing yourself. If you were to focus on the notes and your fingering while you were giving the recital, at the very least, your presentation would be wooden; at worst, your focus would be on performing and your self-consciousness might even cause you to forget the notes altogether.

People who have fully recovered from stuttering—that is, people who have learned to speak spontaneously, the Zen way—will tell you that not only did their speech have to change, but other key aspects of their life as well. Over time, these changes coalesced into a new system that could support effortless, uninhibited self-expression. They created a fluency *system* in which their new speech behaviors, as well as their emotions, perceptions, beliefs, intentions and physiological responses all interactively supported each other. They learned to recognize when it was time to work

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on conscious technique, and when it was necessary to step back, surrender control to the “it”, and allow their spontaneity to carry them forward.

I don’t mean to suggest that bringing this about is a simple process. Permanently removing stuttering from your life so that even the impulse to block is no longer present is a complex and comprehensive undertaking. It usually takes place over a period of time by living it through, step-by-step, and people will approach the process with varying degrees of success.

Success will depend on a number of factors such as the number and intensity of bad experiences the person must overcome, the intensity of feelings that must be managed and explored, the number of bad speech habits that must be brought into awareness, the degree of support that exists in the person’s immediate environment, genetic factors that may interfere with the speaking process, the person’s motivation, the level of perfection they can live with, the person’s beliefs, the talent of the therapist and the quality of the therapeutic relationship.

But if you understand the Zen-like nature of the system and how it works, you can identify which areas in your life, apart from your speech, also need to be addressed.

At the very least, this approach will lead you to a better game of ping-pong.

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PART

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THE PATH TO RECOVERY

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## PART 5

Unfortunately, recovery from chronic stuttering doesn't happen overnight, except in very rare instances. Recovery is usually so gradual that the changes are difficult to spot. Imagine watching an apple tree as it slowly progresses through the growing cycle. First it sprouts a new canopy of leaves, then as spring approaches, a holiday of flowers covers the tree. Eventually, the flowers die, and the immature fruit appears. As summer approaches, the fruit grows and ripens until it is ready to be picked. The changes are constant but subtle, and that is why, if you watched the tree closely for a solid hour, you'd be hard pressed to see any transformation at all.

In the 35-plus years I've been immersed in the stuttering self-help community, I've been able to observe first hand how the speech of hundreds of people has evolved over time. I know those who have completely recovered and whose speech bears no trace of the earlier debilitating blocks. I know many PWS who have significantly improved their speech and who have grown into confident, compelling speakers. I've even met people whose stuttering disappeared completely after just a few sessions with an NLP or other kind of therapist. (In general, such a "quick recovery" person had been pursuing his or her own personal growth some time before they began therapy and were a fluent person waiting to happen.)

Recovery can mean different things to different people. For me, it means that you have the ability to focus on the message and speak with a natural flow with no anticipation of blocks or avoidance behavior. Speaking is no longer an issue for you.

But still, there are those who want to know what it takes to make the blocks disappear completely. "What are my chances?" they ask. So I thought I'd share what I've observed about the personal qualities that seem to improve one's chances of making their blocking disappear, and the five stages of recovery that those who recover tend to pass through.

### *PERSONAL QUALITIES*

**An active curiosity.** The people I know who have successfully overcome chronic stuttering seem to be intrigued by the what, why and how of things. Rather than looking to the speech therapist for all the

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answers, they question why they stutter in this situation but not that; with this person but not that; or why, just when they were speaking so easily, they suddenly locked up. How could they have talked so easily for an entire week and then suddenly find it hard to talk for 20 seconds without blocking. What changed? They stay alert to anything that doesn't make sense and keep coming up with questions. This often leads to meaningful discoveries.

**A good observer.** They notice what's happening around them and make note of anything that seems relevant to their speech..

**Driven by intentions.** Rather than allowing their lives to be run by their expectations, they are driven by their intentions (which also means *defining* their intentions.). This keeps them feeling that they're running their own life.

**Like to communicate.** Even though their speech may be very disfluent, they still make an effort to connect with others. This may include sharing personal experiences and offering suggestions to others on Internet forums and over Skype. It also can involve participating in local stuttering support groups as well as chapters of Toastmasters and Speakers Clubs.

**Show patience.** They recognize that Rome was not built in a day and are quick to celebrate even the smallest successes.

**Stay open to new ideas.** Does genetics causes stuttering? Maybe. Or maybe it's just a contributing factor. They don't lock themselves into a position and continue to see everything through the same window. They maintain an open mind and a broad focus. They read, not just books and articles about stuttering, but about anything that gives them a general grounding in human nature.

**They have a sense of humor.** Even when when things seem to be falling apart, they keep a sense of perspective. They know that things can and do, change.

**An optimistic outlook.** They have an ability to not dwell on what does not work, but simply notice the results and move on.

However, this still begs the question of what it takes to *disappear* stuttering. As someone who experienced such a recovery, I feel I'm in a good position to report on the process of extinction. I can't confirm that everyone who makes the full journey will undergo precisely the same transformational stages. But I suspect that a good percentage who made it through have followed this path.

## *THE FIVE STAGES OF RECOVERY*

**STAGE ONE: Denial.** Almost everyone I've met who's had a chronic stuttering problem had spent his (or her) early years in denial. Why my

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speech would suddenly “stop” was a total mystery to me. I just knew that it happened, and I was terrified by the social consequences. I was very self-conscious and overly sensitive about deviating from the norm. So like other PWS, I worked out ways to hide the blocks as best I could.

**STAGE TWO: Acceptance.** Imagine you suddenly find yourself standing in a four-foot hole. “Omygod,” you say, “I’ve really gotten myself in a hole,” as you push and struggle to climb out. But suppose you believe that smart, intelligent people should never be standing in a four-foot hole. Since you consider yourself smart and intelligent, and since you want people to think well of you, you immediately fall into denial about your current situation.

“Me? Standing in a hole? That’s crazy! Why would I be doing that?” you ask. “That would be stupid.” But then, when you go to walk away, you find yourself strangely hampered. For some reason you can’t move forward. But if you accept where you are, you might see that you’re standing in a hole. Then even though accepting this may make you feel foolish, it frees you to figure out how to climb out and be on your way.

**STAGE THREE: Understanding.** It helps to have people in your life with whom you can talk over your challenges and share your frustrations and successes. You can learn volumes by sharing your ideas and listening to other PWS share theirs in group meetings and on Internet stuttering forums. My involvement in therapy groups with a broad cross section of people showed me how individuals looked the best when they were completely honest, open, and forthcoming. They looked their worst when they tried to hide and present a false image. Formal programs of any sort—either in speech or in personal growth— are not essential, but you do need to be a good observer and have the willingness to reveal who you are.

**STAGE FOUR: Transcending.** Dissolving a debilitating self-image takes time. But as you observe yourself, a new picture will gradually form. You may not come off as nice or as good as you thought you were. You may see how you routinely capitulate to those who you feel are stronger or more knowledgeable. You may get in touch with how much anger, fear and sadness you’ve been holding in since you were little.

You may begin to understand that you’ve been trying to prevent yourself from knowing and experiencing the real YOU. The scared you. The angry you. The strong you. The confident you. All those yous had been suppressed years ago as you adapted to what you thought the adult world wanted of you.

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Once the genie is out of the bottle, so will be your ability to express yourself. If you can combine greater self knowledge with any fluency training you've done and programs like Toastmasters and Speakers Clubs, you'll be able to progress even faster. And you may discover how stronger and more powerful and capable you are than you ever believed was possible.

**STAGE FIVE: Reprogramming.** Changing default behavior is like anything else. It comes through practice and persistence. It's like the martial artist student who one day is surprised that he automatically did the right thing when attacked by an opponent. The recovering PWS discovers one day that he no longer automatically resorts to blocking when faced with a frightening or anxious situation. And even if he does block, it no longer delivers the same punch.

"Oh look at that. I just blocked," he says. "I wonder what's going on?" Then he can review what he experienced and what he did and heighten the awareness of his automatic fear response. In so doing, he can stop himself from slipping into a full-blown panic response.

If he (or she) has studied an approach for managing stuttering and blocking such as McGuire technique, air flow or fluency shaping, he can call on that to handle the mini-crisis, and then slip back into automatic speech.

By and large, for those who have prevailed over chronic stuttering and blocking, communicating has become fun, and they welcome any opportunity to talk. Remember that the bottom line is not perfect fluency. Some people will naturally be fluent, and others will naturally stumble when the pressure is up. The bottom line is whether you can say what you want. The way you want. To whom you want. When you want.

## *WHAT DOES RECOVERY LOOK LIKE?*

The people who tell their recovery stories in this section have all faced down their stuttering monster and come out on top. Most would no longer be identified as a stutterer. And although some may still have an occasional block, it passes quickly without slipping into the old struggle behavior.

The stories are all different because the people are all different. The recipe for recovery is not a production line solution. Each success reflects the unique profile and personality of the individual.

Section Five also includes a landmark piece by Dr. Mark Irwin that introduces a new clinical/diagnostic term that recognizes the multidimensionality of chronic stuttering and blocking. It is something that has long been lacking.

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## STUTTERING IS NOT JUST A SPEECH PROBLEM

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by Alan Badmington

**M**y name is Alan Badmington. You cannot imagine just how much pleasure it gives me to say that in front of an audience. You see, for over 50 years, I experienced extreme difficulty in telling people who I was. Yes, that simple task, which the majority of the population takes so much for granted, caused me so much frustration, anxiety and heartache.

I understand that I commenced stuttering at the age of about 3 years, and although I received early therapy, I do not recall encountering any major difficulties until I entered the grammar school at the age of 11. On the first day, as the registers were being prepared, I have vivid memories of struggling to give my name and address in front of some 30 other pupils, most of whom were complete strangers.

Reading aloud in class was another disaster. As it progressed around the room, I would be calculating (10 desks ahead) exactly what I would be saying. Struck by the stark realisation that my passage contained many words with which I knew I would encounter difficulty, I would opt out, remain silent, and the reading would pass to the next pupil. That was one of the first examples I can recall of approach-avoidance.

Further speech therapy followed without much success. I could read aloud in the therapy room, but could not ask, or respond to, questions in class. I knew the answers but would not dare raise my hand for fear of making a fool of myself. Others around me took the plaudits as I whispered the answers to them.

As I progressed through school, the situation worsened, and I came to accept that I could never speak in front of a group. I felt that I would always have difficulty speaking to people whom I did not know intimately.

In the company of my closest friends, I was reasonably outgoing, whilst in the presence of strangers (and those not so close), I would always have difficulty expressing myself. You see, I had particular problems with words commencing with the initial letter "b" (which was unfortunate because my surname is Badmington). I also had difficulty with "c, d, f, g, j, k, m, n, p, s, t," and "v," to name but a few.

Consequently, I avoided such words and substituted them with synonyms not commencing with the dreaded letters. My oral participation

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would, invariably, be brief (comprising a few hastily delivered, carefully selected words), and I would then withdraw from the conversation. I could never give detailed explanations—I made it a practice to interrupt while others were talking, so that the attention was never focussed on me when I commenced speaking.

So even at that early age, my negative beliefs were being formulated. For example, I believed that:

- I could not speak in front of groups, or persons I did not know personally;
- I could not use words commencing with the initial letter “b, c, d,” etc.;
- I could never give detailed explanations;
- I could never speak while I was the centre of attention;
- That only others could perform in those speaking situations (and I envied those who appeared to speak without worry or concern);

As a prominent sportsman, I represented my school first teams well in advance of others in my age group. Consequently, I was admired by my peers and, unlike many here today, I can never recall being ridiculed or teased because of my stutter.

Earlier, I mentioned the fact that I had problems saying my name. Well, this caused me great heartache when I was selected to play in a prestigious sporting fixture. I promptly arrived at the venue with my kit, but could not pluck up sufficient courage to introduce myself to the persons in charge. They did not know me, I could not tell them—so I did not play.

## *ENTERING THE POLICE SERVICE*

At the age of 19, I took a very important decision in my life; one which was greatly influenced by the fact that I stuttered. I realised that someone who stuttered can take a reasonably sheltered passage through life by choosing to avoid social intercourse; seeking employment with limited speaking opportunities and restricting the occasions on which he/she engages in conversation. Simple, isn't it? If you don't speak, you don't stutter.

Those options were open to me, but I decided that it was not the path I wished to tread. I felt I needed to meet the challenge, and so, I joined the

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Police Service.

In those days, the interview procedure was brief and uncomplicated, comprising of only a few questions (coupled with the usual character checks). Avoiding the problem words, I selected my responses very carefully, and was successful in gaining appointment. On reflection, I feel that the fact that my uncle was formerly the local magistrates' clerk for many years probably influenced the decision.

Today, the interview extends to two days and involves many group speaking situations. Had that been the case then, I would NOT have been selected.

When it came to patrol duties, I just about managed to keep my head above water by various avoidance practices, such as drawing sketches for persons who requested directions. The crunch came when I had to give evidence in court for the very first time. I could not say the oath. I just could not get past the second word – “swear.”

I still have vivid memories of climbing up into the witness box, placing my left hand on the bible, raising my right hand aloft and saying, “I ssssss, I ssssss, I ssssss, I ssssss.” Nothing further would come out of my mouth as I struggled to say a small passage that was such an integral part of my profession.

My eyes closed, my pulse rocketed, perspiration poured from every part of my body as I stood locked in combat with a simple five-letter word. (Ironically, had it been a four-letter word, I would probably not have experienced any difficulty.) The court officials and the public looked on with sheer disbelief at what was happening. Well, at least I can only conjecture at their reactions, because I had entered a state of unconsciousness, totally oblivious to everything around me.

Being a prolific writer of limericks, it was (perhaps) inevitable that I would later recount that incident in verse:

A policeman in court with a stutter  
While giving the oath cause a flutter  
He said, “I ssssssssssssssssssssssssssswear”  
Then gave up in despair  
Not a single word more could he utter.

That was not the end of it. I then had to give the evidence. As I mentioned earlier, my whole life centered around avoidance and word substitution. But, I could not change the defendant's name; I could not change the name of the road in which the offence occurred; the day and date could not be altered, and the defendant's vehicle and registration number were not negotiable. It was impossible, and I was subsequently transferred

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to office duties, away from the public contact that I so much needed.

It had reinforced my belief that I could not say certain words. Neither could I speak in front of others when the focus of attention was on me. These negative beliefs were being cemented – my behaviour and personality were being adjusted to accommodate my stutter.

Yet, only a few hours earlier, I had stood in the very same courtroom, and given the very same evidence without too much difficulty. But the circumstances had been far, far different. On that occasion, the courtroom had been empty and devoid of the audience that later congregated to witness my performance. I had been practicing my spiel in advance of the real event and amply demonstrated to myself that my speech mechanics were not defective. That was little comfort when I later failed miserably under scrutiny.

One of my supervisors later wrote of me, “When this officer gives evidence in court he is an embarrassment to all.” That reinforced my belief that listeners became uncomfortable when I stuttered. He also reported (several years later), “The only reason he has not been considered for promotion is his speech impediment.” (And I still have copies of those reports.)

While very young in service, I passed the national promotion examination and attained third place in the UK (or, rather, England and Wales). This qualified me for an accelerated promotion scheme at the prestigious National Police College, which would have propelled me up through the ranks. They would not accept me because of my stutter.

My belief was, therefore, that I would never be promoted within the Police Service. The point I am trying to make is that the experiences I had encountered were forming the beliefs about myself that I was to hold throughout my adult life.

A few years later, I completed a two weeks fluency course, where I became virtually fluent. Within weeks of leaving that controlled environment, I lost the fluency and reverted to my former stuttering behaviour. You see, there was no follow-up support. I did, in fact, return on a second occasion but, once again, the same thing happened. My belief was that I would never overcome my stutter.

In about 1977, there was another development in my life when I acquired an auditory feedback device called the Edinburgh Masker. This was a small electronic apparatus that blocked out the sound of my own voice by emitting an infernal buzzing sound every time I spoke.

It was simply horrific – just imagine a uniformed police officer wearing a throat microphone and a set of ear moulds, connected to a control box by lengths of wires and tubing concealed beneath his clothing and hair. Indeed, the original machine was equipped with what can only be described

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as a doctor's stethoscope. This was aesthetically unacceptable, and so I made arrangements to have the ear moulds manufactured locally.

The Edinburgh Masker worked on the principle that if you don't hear your own voice, then it will reduce your likelihood of stuttering. I became so reliant on the device that I would not go anywhere without it. I changed my speech pattern to accommodate the masking sound – prolonging the words so that I kept the sound activated. It sounded unnatural, but it helped.

I developed the belief that I could not exist without the Masker and had an array of spare parts on hand in case of failure. I believed that I could not speak without difficulty if I heard my own voice, and became very aware of my own voice when I was not wearing the Masker.

It was, indeed, a monstrosity (in that I was subjected to a buzzing noise every time I spoke), and I was obliged to lip read if anyone chose to speak while I was talking. I wore it for 10/12/14 hours every day over a period of about 20 years, with frequent headaches and ear infections. But without it, I could not have existed in my profession.

After several years, I persuaded my employers to allow me to return to operational duties. With the aid of the Masker I renewed the public contact that I had been denied for so many years. I gave evidence in court, dealt with incidents and even attempted a spot of lecturing. The latter was not really successful but at least the Edinburgh Masker allowed me to attempt it. Previously, I would never have tried.

So my beliefs changed from "I can't speak in front of a group" to "When wearing the Masker I can speak in front of a group with a lesser degree of difficulty." I enjoyed the way I felt after giving a lecture. I enjoyed the experience of speaking in front of people. My feelings about myself were much so much warmer and pleasing. I also wore the Masker socially and found that it gave me greater confidence in those circumstances.

I met dozens of people daily and expanded my comfort zones. My speech was better in some circumstances than others, but I was never fluent. I wore the Masker at all times – it had become my mechanical crutch. Without it, I could not have undertaken my role. I constantly lived with the threat that it might let me down, and one day it did in a big way.

Having developed my writing skills in order to compensate for my speech problems, I became editor of the Force newspaper. On one occasion I was invited to prepare a *This is Your Life* book for a retiring Chief Constable. Wearing the Masker, I plucked up the courage to present it to him in front of about 200 people. (I wasn't asked, I volunteered. I had written the script, and I wanted the credit).

I spoke reasonably well for the first five minutes or so, stuttering moderately, but then disaster occurred. One of the wires became dislodged and the masking sound ceased. I could hear my voice. I had severe problems

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with the remainder of the presentation, and when it was completed my clothing was drenched in perspiration. I felt crestfallen and devastated in front of such a distinguished audience.

Yet only a few minutes earlier (before the device had failed) I had managed to undertake the role of presenter, albeit not in the Michael Aspel<sup>1</sup> mould. When the Masker had been working I believed I could speak reasonably well. I could not hear my own voice and I was detached from the occasion. However, once the masking sound had been removed, I experienced great difficulty and reverted to my old speech behaviours. But at least I had not avoided the situation.

On another occasion I played the part of Goldilocks in a pantomime<sup>2</sup> that I had written for a Christmas party. I spoke with a female voice throughout and had no problem whatsoever. It was not Alan Badmington who was being assertive but Goldilocks. It was acceptable for *her* to speak loudly and assertively in front of a crowd, but not *me*.

A senior officer who was present expressed the view that I should always talk with a high-pitched voice. I declined his suggestion but to this very day I am convinced that I could have gained promotion in the Policewomen's Department. I thoroughly enjoyed the Thespian experience – I was doing something totally alien to my normal behaviour. I found it pleasurable holding the attention of an audience, and it gave me a desire to perform in front of people.

The Masker continued to let me down in really important situations. Whilst I could chat reasonably well with my colleagues (when wearing the Masker), it would inevitably let me down at promotion board interviews and other important occasions. So much so that midway through one such interview, an irate Chief Constable terminated the proceedings and told me not to waste his time in the future.

He made it abundantly clear that he would never consider promoting me. That reaffirmed my belief that I could never gain advancement because of my stutter.

I retired from the Police Service in 1993 and stopped wearing the Edinburgh Masker on a regular basis. I only wore it on special occasions but always kept it near the telephone at home. My speech deteriorated and my comfort zones became very narrow.

In 1996 I was involved in a car accident and found myself confined to home. I could not use the Masker because of whiplash injuries. I relin-

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Aspel is presenter of the popular British television programme "This Is Your Life."

<sup>2</sup> A pantomime is a kind of play performed (in the UK) at Christmas time in which, traditionally, the principal female character is played by a man.

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quished my role as adviser to a national television series and had virtually no contact with anyone apart from my immediate family. My speech hit rock bottom, my emotions and esteem were at a low ebb. I was in pain, would not answer the telephone, indulged in very limited social contact and had a great deal of time to dwell on my speech.

In May 2000, everything changed. My wife persuaded me, after much resistance, to undertake a fluency programme.

It was at that time I first learned of the existence of John Harrison, one of the earliest members of the National Stuttering Project in the USA, as well as being its former Associate Director. That organisation subsequently became known as the National Stuttering Association and John has been the editor of its newsletter, *Letting GO*, for many years. He and I have become great friends since our first meeting in California last August, and I know that I am speaking today with his total blessing.

John Harrison understands stuttering not simply as a speech problem, but as a system involving the entire person – an interactive system that is composed of at least six essential components: physiological responses, behaviours, emotions, perceptions, beliefs and intentions. In order to facilitate explanation of his paradigm (or model), John Harrison devised a six-sided diagram, which he refers to as the Stuttering Hexagon

If you receive therapy, or attend a fluency course, you may see an improvement in your speech *in that environment* because, in addition to the various control techniques being implemented, your self-image, perceptions, beliefs and emotions are positively influenced by the relationship with the therapist.

But that is not enough. If you do not make efforts to address other matters relating to your life (such as the limited way you see yourself; your long-held, self-defeating negative beliefs; your unwillingness to take risks, etc), the other points on the Stuttering Hexagon are likely to pull your speech back into balance with the rest of the system. Eventually, you will find yourself slipping back into the same old patterns.

## *THE STUTTERING HEXAGON*

Our bodies have been genetically programmed to initiate a fight-or-flight reaction whenever our physical survival is threatened. The heightened adrenaline flow, increased heart rate, and other symptoms are triggered to meet the threat, but fear of talking is usually not a physical danger; it is a social danger. But your body cannot differentiate. It still responds the same way, thus adding to your insecurity and discomfort.

There is not not much you can do to alter the physiological system you

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were born with. However, when the shop assistant has a look of impatience, or is abrupt, by exercising control over the other parts of the hexagon, you can reduce the frequency with which you experience these fight-or-flight responses.

For example, there are specific behaviours that are counter productive to fluent speech – holding the breath, pursing the lips, locking the vocal chords, etc. I did all of these. If a person curtails these behaviours, or improves his or her technique, then fluency can be enhanced.

There are certain feelings that contribute to, or result from, our stuttering. You will recognize all of them: fear, hurt, anger, frustration, helplessness, embarrassment, shame, and vulnerability. Those of us who stutter have always tried to depersonalise the speaking experience because it was painful. We did not wish to feel the feelings any more than we had to. We avoided eye contact; we detached ourselves from the speaking situation; we retreated. That very attitude of holding back is what helps to create and perpetuate our speech blocks.

My own ability to block out these feelings was so automatic that I failed to recognise that these feelings existed. When we stutter, there is a sense of panic and we are completely unconscious to what is occurring. We don't even realise that we are having feelings at that moment because we become totally oblivious. (As I did in the courtroom).

Instead of suppressing these intense feelings, I learned to experience them as they surfaced and to use them to energize my speech in a similar manner to actors who use their nervousness and high adrenaline level to put energy into their performance.

I learned to understand the differences between creative and negative discomfort. Negative discomfort is the kind that debilitates us. It is usually associated with holding back something that wants to be expressed. Creative discomfort, on the other hand, is experienced when you let go.

Perceptions also come into play. If we feel that we are an oddity because of how we speak, then we perceive that the whispered comments of one person to another are about us. For example, if I had passed a group of unsavoury individuals as I was entering the courtroom, and they started whispering, I might have perceived that they were talking about me – about my speech – whereas, they may well have been discussing how one of their number had seduced the inspector's daughter the previous weekend. In all likelihood, their conduct would have had nothing to do with me.

If your hexagon is in the negative (in any of the component areas) then this can affect how you react to, or envisage, any situation. If you have been involved in a blazing row with your girlfriend, or wife (or both); or just had a bad speaking experience on the telephone, you would be at a low ebb – thereby affecting your beliefs and, correspondingly, your perceptions, in a

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negative manner.

Persons who stutter tend to have a fixation that whatever happens in their lives is related to their speech. Their speech is uppermost in their minds at all times. They go to bed thinking about their speech. They wake up thinking about their speech. Speech, speech, speech – it consumes them. Our irrational thinking about our speech totally influences our perceptions. Nearly every time I spoke, I perceived that I was being judged.

My beliefs with respect to my stuttering came about in two ways, but were often without foundation. These beliefs came about in two different ways. First, they were created by everything that happened to me; while secondly, they were developed through contact with authoritative figures (such as my parents, teachers, police colleagues etc). Indeed, they can be passed from grandfather to father to son.

I believed that I could not gain promotion because my speech would prove a hindrance. (My former Chief Constable certainly substantiated that belief for me).

I believed that I should avoid pausing at all costs. Once I managed to get started, I believed that I had to continue speaking while I enjoyed a degree of fluency.

We may believe that we shall never become effective speakers. I certainly held that belief until last year.

Many persons who stutter feel they are flawed because of their stutter. They believe that they have to please others and that they have to be perfect to be liked and accepted. That was true for me for as long as I can remember. I felt I had to compensate for my speech problem by excelling at everything I did (sport, report writing, appearance, punctuality etc) and performing a volume of work far greater than my “fluent” colleagues.

They also believe that the fears and panic they feel in front of others are unique to them; that “normal fluent” people don’t experience such feelings when they have to stand and address a group.

(Surveys clearly indicate that this is not the case. Public speaking is quoted as the number one fear of everyone. It is NOT unique to persons who stutter. When I joined speaking clubs last year, I found that there were several members who became extremely agitated prior to speaking.)

Beliefs are the most powerful long-term influence on your hexagon and will be the last thing to change as you deal with the rest of the hexagon. In fact, I would say that beliefs are the beginning of the real change. Once you change your beliefs positively, you are well on the road to empowerment.

Once my beliefs were formed, I shaped my perceptions to fit those beliefs. In effect, my beliefs functioned like a pair of tinted sun glasses; colouring the way I saw and experienced life. As I gradually changed my beliefs about myself and others, speaking situations became much less

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threatening.

And finally, as I became more aware of my hidden intentions (i.e.,: my intentions to talk and hold back at the same time), I was able to directly address that conflict.

### *APPLYING THE PRINCIPLES*

Let me now relate what I learned about the Stuttering Hexagon to some of the speaking situations that I have experienced in my life. You may recall my telling you earlier about the courtroom scene that gave me so many problems. The seeds of doubt were sown some weeks before the court appearance, when I learned that I would be required to give evidence. I must have rehearsed the oath a hundred times, when alone. I knew the second word commenced with the feared letter “S” (swear), and that the oath also contained many other problematical letters.

Let us examine those beliefs and see how they created a negative set of expectations:

- Due to my previous difficulties with these letters, I believed that I would stutter and make a fool of myself.
- I believed that I could not speak in front of an audience when I was the centre of attention.
- I believed I could not say the oath, or my name.
- I believed I would be judged by my performance (especially as a young officer on probation).
- I believed the court would expect me to be perfect.
- I believed I would be performing in front of people who would not understand or be sympathetic to my problem.

My perceptions (at the time of being in court) were:

- The group of young men at the back of the court, who I had cause to deal with a couple of weeks earlier for public disorder, were talking about me and eagerly waiting for me to stutter.
  - I was making a fool of myself, and news of this would quickly spread, and I would become a laughing stock.
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My physiological system was generating a fully-fledged fight or flight reaction. My body was pouring adrenaline into the blood stream, my blood pressure was rising etc. My emotions were rooted in fear and terror. (After all, I had experienced severe problems during a mock court exercise, while attending a training course a few months earlier.)

My intentions were that I should say the oath and then give the evidence. But my speech failed me. I was being pulled by two opposing forces – the poles of divided intention. I wanted to say the oath, the situation demanded that I say the oath, but I was fearful of stuttering. I was fearful of revealing my secret, my deficiencies, to everyone present. So I held myself back and blocked.

Let us now retrace my steps to two hours earlier. I arrive at the court in advance of everyone else, with one colleague (a personal friend of mine) for the purpose of practicing my evidence. I walk the same path to the witness box, climb up into the same hallowed area, place my left hand on the same bible and recite, “I swear by Almighty God that the evidence I shall give, shall be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.”

Absolutely perfect. Shall I tell you why? All the elements – the negative emotions, perceptions, beliefs, intentions and physiological responses that characterised the real event – were not present. Instead there were positive forces.

I knew the other officer well and perceived him as a friend. I believed I could speak in front of him without too much difficulty. I knew it was not necessary to perform well to earn his high regard. He was not judging me. I knew that he was aware that I stuttered, so there was an absence of fear that my secret would be exposed. I knew there would not be any pomp and ceremony. I knew it didn’t really matter if I stuttered. It was only an unimportant trial run.

The positive forces had reinforced each other to create a benign hexagon – one in which the need to hold back was not an issue. Thus I had little, if any, difficulty with the hitherto dreaded words when giving the oath and then continued to recite my evidence in a like manner. I knew that I would not be challenged by any hostile party.

As I was not holding back, I did not create the block. I was not fearful of what I would expose when I spoke. WHAT A CONTRAST!

## *A WEDDING EXPERIENCE*

Let us also examine what happened at my wedding some years later. I knew from experience that when someone else spoke, or read, at the same time as myself, I would not encounter speaking difficulties. I made good use of this when it came time to say my wedding vows. In our pre-ceremony

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meetings with the vicar, we came to an arrangement whereby he would recite a line and then repeat it quietly when I was saying it.

What I didn't bargain for was my caring bride who, in order to ensure I didn't have any problems, also joined in saying my vows. So you can just imagine it – the vicar would say a line and then *all three of us* would repeat it. Of course, mine was the loudest and most prominent voice – the other two merely whispered. But I was aware of the support. No one else realised what we were doing and everything went perfectly.

Now let us examine that episode.

I believed I could speak when someone else spoke at the same time as (in my eyes) I would not be the centre of attention. Like many persons who stutter, I felt uncomfortable hearing the sound of my own voice, associating it with all the shame and embarrassment I had experienced over the years. Thus, with my wife and the vicar joining me, I was detached from my own speech and the negative emotional feelings were not present.

I perceived the vicar and my wife as friendly and supportive persons. Because I was relaxed about the situation, I did not experience the usual feelings of fear and panic (the physiological responses).

I intended to say the vows, and I was not holding back. As there was no conflict (divided intentions), a speech block did not occur, thereby allowing the speech function to be completed.

Every component in the hexagon was positive, reacting positively with one another.

So there is another example of how the hexagon works. Having said that it went well, there are still a few things that concern me regarding that episode. I frequently lie awake at night, wrestling with the following questions:

Am I married to my wife?

Am I married to the vicar?

Is my wife married to the vicar? or

Are we all three joined in holy matrimony?

Contrast this with what happened a few hours later at the wedding reception. I rose to speak in front of the guests and had terrible problems. I said a few sentences, blocked and blocked again. It was so bad that one of my aunts intervened and started singing "For he's a jolly good fellow." Everyone joined in, and I sat down a very disappointed and humiliated bridegroom.

I was not disappointed with my new bride, I should quickly explain – but with my inability to complete the speech that I had rehearsed for weeks. There was nothing organically wrong with my speech, but there were

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significant changes in my emotions, perceptions, beliefs, intentions, physiological responses and speech-related struggles in the two environments.

Unlike the situation in the church involving the vows, everything had changed. Let us look at that painful episode in more detail.

- I believed I could not speak in front of a large crowd and would make a fool of myself – and I did.
  - I believed that I could not speak while the focus of attention was on me. (I wasn't so much worried about any feared words because I had written the speech myself and carefully omitted any letters that normally presented difficulty).
  - I always spoke in short, sharp bursts and believed that I could not orate anything of a lengthy nature (even though it extended to only eight or ten lines).
  - I believed that most guests would be embarrassed when (not IF) I stuttered.
  - I perceived that many of those present would not understand my problem.
  - I perceived that those who knew I stuttered were waiting for me to slip up.
  - I perceived that my wife and parents were anxious for me.
  - My physiological responses created the usual fight or flight reaction, with the accompanying bodily changes.
  - My emotions were totally immersed in fear, panic, vulnerability and embarrassment.
  - I was caught up in the speak/don't speak conflict. I wanted to continue speaking – it was the happiest day of my life. But I was fearful of stuttering, laying myself bare and revealing my speech difficulty to all present. This power struggle caused me to hold back, and the inevitable speech blocks occurred.
  - Everything was negative, each component reacting negatively with each other to have a detrimental effect on my speech behaviour.
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## TURNING A CORNER

In May 2000, everything changed when my wife persuaded me to make one last effort to overcome my speech problem. I fought tooth and nail – but she is a very persuasive lady. I had suffered so much heartache in my life (as a result of failed therapies) that I vowed I would never again place myself in a situation where I might be exposed to such disappointment.

I had retired from the Police Service, so my speech was no longer an issue in respect of employment. In any case, I doubted that I could generate the enthusiasm, or even interest, and felt content in the limited comfort zones to which I had withdrawn following a car accident. At the time, I hardly wore my Edinburgh Masker and, in fact, had only minor social contact. I rarely left the comfort of my own home. If the telephone rang, I frequently ignored it.

My wife implored me to give it one last shot and so, with an incredible degree of scepticism I very begrudgingly agreed.

The programme I joined deals with stuttering from a holistic perspective, and it was while attending my first course, just 16 months ago, that I learned about John Harrison. John is not actively involved with the programme, but he has very kindly allowed abbreviated versions of his workshops (devised to overcome the fear of public speaking) to be incorporated into the programme. John doesn't run the workshops; his concepts and ideas are merely used by those attending.

So it was just sixteen months ago that I initially became aware of the Stuttering Hexagon. And for the very first time in my life, I understood that whether or not I stuttered, depended very much on how I felt at any particular time. I observed how a whole host of other factors affected my ability to speak.

I learned how to physically overcome speech blocks. I was given the tools to greatly reduce the likelihood of a speech block occurring, and also, how to release a speech block should one occur. Armed with that, and many, many other valuable facets (including an understanding of the physiology and psychology of stuttering), I set out along the road to recovery.

By the second day of the four day course I was walking on air. I was speaking like I had never spoken before, and I was enjoying it. I was talking in front of groups for the very first time in my life while not wearing the Edinburgh Masker. I could hear my own voice – it was initially disconcerting – but I liked what I heard.

When these four days ended I knew that the real challenge lay ahead. I had tasted fluency many years earlier (although never as manageable as now) but, previously, I had not been able to sustain it for any length of time

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outside the security and safety of a course environment. I felt this was different; I knew so much more about stuttering and myself, and I knew that I had the lifelong support of the programme.

"Keep moving forward" and "Push out your comfort zones" were two of the many sayings I retained in my head. God knows, I had heard them enough in those four days. I knew that if I was to sustain the incredible gains I had attained, I needed to strictly adhere to this advice. So, using the new technique I had been taught, I immediately set out to dismantle the psychological framework that I had erected to support myself during a lifetime of stuttering.

I had so many negative beliefs, negative perceptions, negative emotions and negative practices to eradicate. I knew that I had to create a fluency system in which my new speech behaviours, as well as emotions, perceptions, beliefs, intentions and psychological responses, all interactively supported each other.

I began placing myself in situations where I did things I would not previously have attempted. I knew that I had to face my fears, I needed to challenge the negative beliefs and feelings that I had developed (in many cases unconsciously) over so many years and, above all, I resolved that I would never again practice avoidance. I would never again succumb to the temptation of substituting an easy word for a difficult word, and I promised myself that I would accept, and never avoid, the challenge of any speaking situation.

In effect, much of this had already commenced during the course when I participated in the Harrison exercises, which are principally designed to improve speaking in front of people, but also to demonstrate how to challenge and change certain lifelong traits. This involved speaking in front of groups by using exaggerated techniques designed to help us let go. They included such tasks as projecting one's voice, maintaining eye contact, use of inordinately ..... long.....pauses, speaking with feeling, and adding "music" to one's voice. There were many others.

It was uncomfortable doing something I had always avoided, but that was the purpose of the exercise. I was experiencing positive discomfort. You WILL feel uncomfortable on the first occasion, less uncomfortable on the second, and so on. Eventually, the discomfort will depart as that way of speaking begins to feel natural. It was great fun, and I still engage in such workshops today. I am now at ease and find it enjoyable. I have lost my inhibitions. This is the REAL me.

Your ability to tolerate short periods of discomfort is the key to change. If you are willing to take a chance, and hang on in there, you can bring about a significant shift in your attitude and self-image.

On my return home, I spent many hours speaking on the telephone

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with persons who had previously attended similar courses. Most were complete strangers – that made it a far greater challenge. My confidence was sky-high as I chatted, and I began to feel good about myself. If my new technique strayed, then I was quickly corrected by the graduate on the other end of the line.

In addition, I regularly attended support groups that had been set up and run by graduates of the programme. Here again, I expanded my comfort zones and reinforced the speaking technique. Perhaps more importantly, I also reinforced my belief that my recovery was not temporary or fragile (as had been the case on previous occasions).

Each day, I would spend lengthy periods on the telephone, speaking to businesses that I had selected from the Yellow Pages directory and making the most outrageous enquiries. All had free phone numbers – so I did not have to incur any expenditure.

With each telephone call, the fear was reduced. I had demonstrated to myself that I could speak authoritatively during a lengthy telephone conversation to complete strangers. Of course I experienced fear, but I kept uppermost in my mind the words of American psychologist, Susan Jeffers – “Feel the fear, and do it anyway.”

Throughout our marriage, my wife had always undertaken the task of making my appointments with the doctor, dentist, etc. – but now this was to change. A few days after my first course, I boldly marched into the doctors’ surgery. In front of a waiting crowd, I projected my voice and said, “Please may I have the prescription for Alan Badmington.”

On previous occasions, my wife would have collected it, or I would have produced my National Health card (or shown a piece of paper) that conspicuously bore my name. I am not saying that I wasn’t nervous, but I faced the fear, told myself that I could do it and reaped the reward. I have since repeated it on many occasions, thus reinforcing my positive beliefs.

Returning to the practice of writing my name on a piece of paper, I well recall the day (many years ago) when I took an item of clothing to the dry cleaners. I had omitted to carry my usual written note and when the assistant requested my name, I panicked and said, “Adrian Adams.” (I never had problems with vowels.) This was all very well until my landlady kindly decided to do me a favour and collect that item a few days later. She duly gave my name as “Alan Badmington” but, as we all know, it was not recorded under my correct identity. I had a lot of explaining to do.

But now, success followed success, and I could feel my whole self-image changing. I began to believe in myself. I did not have the negative feelings of self-doubt. This positivity created a chain reaction within my hexagon and had a positive effect in my speech.

During my course, I had been encouraged to engage in conversation

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with complete strangers in the street, and one day I spoke to nearly 300 people. I told many that I was a recovering stutterer and was amazed at the interest, and words of encouragement, that I received. Quite apart from the fact that I was accepting myself as a stutterer, I was also desensitizing the situation. I began believing that I could speak to total strangers about my speech problem, (or any subject) and my negative perception that they would be embarrassed, or might ridicule me, was replaced with a positive perception.

### *A VISIT TO AMERICA*

Things took a dramatic turn in August 2000 when I travelled to California to help set up the first American programme. My role was to publicize the forthcoming event by telling my story. As I flew alone across the Atlantic to San Francisco, I wondered what I had let myself in for. Only three months earlier (after more than half a century of stuttering) I still had difficulty in saying my name. Yet now, I was thousands of miles from home and knew that I would be required to introduce myself to a multitude of strangers.

I literally knocked on the door of every newspaper office, radio station and TV studio in the corridor running from San Francisco to Northern Nevada. I went for two weeks and stayed for six weeks – what an adventure!

During that time I transformed my Stuttering Hexagon ten thousand fold. For fifty years it had been negative, but that was now to change permanently. I did things I, hitherto, thought were impossible. You cannot imagine the immense satisfaction I gained from speaking to every section of the media.

Before I move on, let me just take a few minutes to tell you, briefly, about how my hexagon had a massive positive boost early in the U.S. adventure. Shortly after my arrival in San Francisco, I made the acquaintance of John Harrison for the first time. We hit it off straightaway and have become good friends.

John very kindly invited me out for a series of meals in the “City by the Bay.” Each time we dined, we talked and talked well into the early hours. Two things that John told me had such a positive influence upon my hexagon and, subsequently, my life.

When returning me to my place of residence one night, he suddenly said, “Alan, you’re a remarkable conversationalist and very inspirational.” You cannot imagine how that affected me. For over 50 years, I had struggled to talk to people; I had been castigated for the manner in which I gave evidence in court; a Chief Constable had prematurely terminated a Promotion Board interview because I was “wasting his time.” And I had failed

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miserably to give a speech at my wedding.

John's comments took some time to sink in. I told him that I had never considered that I possessed either of those qualities. He reiterated his opinion. Various components in my hexagon changed considerably that night:

- I believed that persons enjoyed listening to me.
- I believed that I could inspire others.
- I believed I could speak well, and interestingly, for lengthy periods of time.
- I believed that others wanted to hear my opinions.
- My previous long-held perception that persons were embarrassed when I spoke, moved from negative to positive.
- My emotions took a distinct upturn; I was elated and overjoyed with my efforts.
- My self-image was widening, and I liked the person I was becoming.

I had so many positive experiences during my perambulations around California and Nevada – too numerous to mention. However, let me recount one particular incident to further illustrate the hexagon in action.

I was visiting one of the major TV stations in San Francisco. Security within major cities is quite rigid, and I was obliged to relate my story to the news desk via the house telephone. This was situated right in the heart of the busy public waiting area, where at least 25 to 30 persons were congregated.

This was a stutterer's worst nightmare...talking on the telephone before a listening audience. Initially, I found this disconcerting but, as time progressed, I became less aware of those around me. When I completed the call, several members of the public approached me, expressed their interest in my recovery and wished me every success. (As it was obvious that my conversation had been heard by everyone, I felt justified in awarding myself full marks for voice projection.)

There were many, many more occasions where I was obliged to use the house phone in public areas, but I knew I could do it because I had done it before, and each time it became easier. Quite apart from increasing my self-belief, my perceptions of how the listening public would react changed

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dramatically. They were NOT embarrassed to hear my story, and I gained in confidence. My emotions became positive, and I spoke well.

Throughout my journey north to Nevada, I talked openly about my recovery in every situation. I engaged in conversation with complete strangers in restaurants; in the street; in motels; in casinos; in shops; in laundries – indeed, anywhere. The reactions I encountered were quite unbelievable; all were courteous and nearly everyone knew someone who stuttered. I became totally desensitised and my perceptions and beliefs about what others thought in relation to my speech became so positive.

Newspaper after newspaper carried my story, and I was to undergo many radio and television interviews. My comfort zones continued to expand as well as my previously narrow self-image.

### *EXPANDING HORIZONS*

Following my return to the U.K., I joined three speakers' clubs and now regularly give prepared and impromptu speeches. One experienced member, who was a public speaking tutor for more than 25 years, confided (on hearing me make my maiden speech) that he would never have suspected I had ever been troubled by a speech impediment. It is comments of this nature that help to change the narrow and negative way in which we have viewed ourselves for so long.

A few months ago, I engineered a "chance" meeting with my former Chief Constable at the funeral of a colleague. I knew he would be present and purposely sought him out. I had experienced some harrowing moments while speaking to him in the past, and wanted to exorcise those ghosts. He was wide-mouthed when he told me that he did not recognise me as the officer who had served under his command for so many years, and whom he would not promote under any circumstances.

Having achieved this, my hexagon rocketed with positivity, and it was not long before I embarked upon the next stage of dismantling my stuttering structure.

Live radio interview followed live radio interview (not just about stuttering but also about other topics) as I pursued my relentless quest for recovery. I am not ashamed to admit that I regularly play over those tapes when I am in the car. Not for any egotistical reason but merely as a positive affirmation.

Since childhood, my stuttering had been fuelled by the pain and misery I encountered. For over half a century I constantly reminded myself of what I could NOT do, or the dire consequences of attempting to speak in certain situations. I spent a lifetime accumulating, recounting and giving far too much prominence to the memories of bad speaking experiences; that is how

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my stutter developed and thrived. The more I nourished and sustained it, the more it took hold. I make no excuse for reversing that trait. The worm has turned, and I now constantly remind myself of the successes I enjoy. Never shirk from telling yourself how much you have achieved.

One radio interview lasted for 15 minutes (it was originally scheduled for seven minutes, but I just kept talking and talking). My eyes never fail to water when, at its conclusion, the interviewer comments, "Wasn't that an inspirational chat. Alan, a stutterer and stammerer for over fifty years, and now you'd never know." That certainly keeps my hexagon positive.

It received a further boost, a short while ago, when a police newsletter (which is circulated to all retired police personnel within my former force) carried an article about my recovery. It said, "You will all remember Alan when he served in the Constabulary. He suffered from a stammer that was a big obstacle to him during his police service and, more or less, confined him to administrative duties which prevented his promotion."

Referring to the first of my many interviews on BBC Radio Wales, the item continued, "It was amazing to hear Alan speaking with such confidence and without any trace of his stammer."

Nothing will ever make amends for the heartache and catalogue of lost opportunities that tainted my police career but, at least, my former colleagues will now view me in an entirely different light. My beliefs, perceptions, emotions and speech are now so positive. (I should mention that the newsletter article was not of my own initiation but resulted from someone hearing the radio broadcast.)

During the past few months, I have further expanded my comfort zones by undertaking a series of lectures at Arkansas State University. The Professor of Speech and Language Disorders thought it would be useful if I gave her classes of future speech-language pathologists an insight into my lifetime of stuttering.

After the final presentation I was given a birthday cake to celebrate the first anniversary of the commencement of my recovery, together with a model turtle – the significance of which is that a turtle can only move forward if it pushes its neck out. The professor suggested that I had certainly pushed my neck out during the preceding twelve months.

During my life, as I suffered the social consequences of malfunctioning speech, I changed the way I felt about myself, and others. I developed social strategies to protect myself from shame and embarrassment. I also developed strategies for pushing out, or hiding, difficult words. When these changes began to influence and reinforce each other, the problem became self-perpetuating.

All these adjustments were made to support my stuttering. I knew that if I did not change the components in this system, the same system would

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have waited for the missing component (my stutter) to reappear. I was not prepared to allow that to happen. So every day (even now) I set myself new goals as I continue to etch and erode the negativity that influenced my life and my speech for so long. I am determined that my old stuttering behaviour will never return. I am showing myself differently to the world, and I love the way it is reacting differently to me.

My programme recognises that changing personal defaults in a number of areas does not occur overnight, and allows graduates to return on as many occasions as they wish. I have now completed nine courses. I didn't need to go back as many times as that. I *chose* to return. [You can continually reaudit the programme for practically no charge since returning graduates function as coaches for new students.] During that time I have become empowered by coaching others, in addition to maintaining my own recovery, confirming that the best way to learn something is to teach it to others.

As a person who stuttered, I had a narrow self-image. Anything that challenged that image I perceived as a threat to my well-being. But a self-image that is too narrow and constrictive to accommodate our entire personality imprisons us. It forces us to curtail our activities so that we may continue to act "in character." Persons who stutter avoid expanding their comfort zones. Many continue to limit their lives to doing only those things that make them feel safe. We cast ourselves in a diminished role and are content to remain in the same old safe, predictable world, maintaining the status quo.

On the other hand, if we can broaden this self-image to accommodate the different sides of ourselves, then we are able to play all these roles, and be comfortable in doing so. The moment you are willing to give up your old self-image, you will find that there are incredible opportunities for change. But unless you change your Stuttering Hexagon, you will fight any changes in your speech because it does not fit within your normal self-image.

In order to achieve this, you need to do certain things over and over until these behaviours become familiar and you get used to seeing yourself in these new roles. Only then will they become a welcome and acceptable part of the 'real' you. Until permanent changes occur – through continual expansion – the hexagon will remain vulnerable.

I now realise that, although I was not aware of John Harrison's concepts until last year, I had made considerable changes in my own personal stuttering hexagon over the years, aided, of course, by the Edinburgh Masker. Despite the setbacks, I had already set up a system that would support greater fluency and fuller self-expression. I recognise that I owe an immense debt of gratitude to the McGuire Programme for providing the final piece of the jigsaw and, like a laser beam, all my energies are now

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moving in the same direction.

I strongly believe that my communicative difficulties were not merely associated with the mechanics of speech. Hopefully, I have demonstrated my reasons for claiming that, “stuttering is not just a speech problem.”

The need to overcome fear has been a prominent thrust of my presentation, and I would like to conclude by reciting a hastily composed limerick that, I feel, appropriately reflects that sentiment:

When you stutter, some think you're a dope  
At times, it is so hard to cope  
Whether mild or severe  
Face up to your fear  
If you let yourself go, then there's hope.

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Alan Badmington enjoys dialoging with people the world over and can be reached at [alan@highfieldstile.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:alan@highfieldstile.fsnet.co.uk). Those wanting to know more about the McGuire Programme are directed to the organization's website at [www.mcguireprogramme.com](http://www.mcguireprogramme.com).

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## AND THE STUTTERING JUST DIES

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by Jack Menear

*[In early 1982 I came upon a rather unusual article that someone had sent to the National Stuttering Association. The author, Jack Menear, had apparently recovered from stuttering, and he attributed his recovery to the fact that he had adopted a different way of thinking. The ideas, although expressed in different words, were remarkably similar to what I had also discovered about my own stuttering. Perhaps what I had learned was more of a universal truth than I had imagined. We ended up running the article on two different occasions in the pages of Letting GO, and it generated more response and comment from our readers than any other article we had run to date. – JH]*

I stuttered for twenty some years, and it seemed that there was no place to find real help. Through a year of self-analysis of the problem, the way out became apparent. Since I never went the route of speech therapy, my approach to becoming fluent is non-standard. It is clear now that stuttering is really a whole lifestyle founded on incorrect mental habits. When the speech blocks are identified as the outward expression of these mental habits, the habits can be changed, and the stuttering just dies.

It is important to note the passive element in this approach. Rather than focusing on “beating stuttering”, I focused on eliminating the mental habits that prompted it. The stuttering falls aside without direct confrontation. As a result, the classic approach of pre-, post-, and in-block correction is not important.

### *FUNDAMENTAL THOUGHTS ABOUT STUTTERING*

Malcomb Fraser [founder of the Stuttering Foundation of America] makes an interesting statement about stuttering: “...the statement can be made that stuttering is largely what the stutterer does trying not to stutter. In other words, it is an incredible trick which you play on yourself because you have such a consuming desire to speak fluently.” This statement accurately reflects that the reason we stutter is because we are afraid

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This article first appeared in the National Stuttering Project monthly newsletter *Letting GO* in January 1982.

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we might stutter. Later in the same chapter, Fraser follows this up with, “If there were some way you could distract your mind from thoughts of fear, or you didn’t think about it, possibly you wouldn’t have any trouble. Or if you could forget you were a stutterer, you probably wouldn’t stutter, but we don’t know how you could develop such a forgettery.”

It’s no wonder that people have given up on developing a “forgettery.” The harder you try not to think about something, the more you actually are thinking about it. One could say, “I won’t think about stuttering. I won’t think about stuttering. I won’t think about stuttering.” But the truth is that you’re thinking about stuttering. What a frustrating circle it is!

But I don’t think this route should be neglected. There is a way around this dilemma, and it is the fastest way to ending the stuttering problem. In addition, if this route is chosen, there is no residual dependence on blocking techniques or tricks. And since the route is based on truth and honesty, permanence is guaranteed.

In a nutshell, the answer to developing this “forgettery” requires that you stop fighting the stuttering. Don’t even fight the causes. Just be willing to give up the patterns of thinking that stimulate the stuttering. Don’t fight and confront—just let it go.

## *THE MENTAL PATTERNS THAT CAUSE STUTTERING*

To understand the mental patterns that cause stuttering there are two obvious places to look: (1) the differences between how a non-stutterer thinks when talking as compared to a stutterer, and (2) the difference you feel inside during periods of fluency and non-fluency.

It is a fact that we are in the habit of anticipating and trying to control that gives rise to the fear and tension which ultimately leads to stuttering. Probably as a group, stutterers are the most introspective people in the world. The mere thought of stuttering is so frightening that it focuses our whole world inward. With time, this inward focus is all we know. It becomes accepted that we consciously anticipate each time we’ll have to talk. A frantic scramble to gain control becomes consuming, and by the time we actually do have to speak, we’ve “lived” the experience a hundred times in our mind. By anticipating and trying to control, we’ve allowed the fear of stuttering to gain such momentum that we force ourselves to stutter.

If we let go of the mental habits of anticipating and controlling, we desensitize ourselves to the fear of stuttering, and, hence, the stuttering itself dies out. In essence, we allow ourselves to think about speaking like a non-stutterer. A nonstutterer just lets his words flow; it never occurs to him to anticipate his words or control how each word leaves his mouth.

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Fortunately (or unfortunately), stuttering is not the only affliction based on the fear of fear. The stutterer has a fear that he (or she) may have a fear of stuttering; agoraphobias (people with a fear of leaving the safety of their home) have a fear of their fear also. And, of course, it's based on anticipation and need for control starting the whole thing off. Dr. Claire Weekes has proposed four simple rules that have effectively helped agoraphobias, and these rules apply equally well for stutterers. Dr. Weekes' rules (modified by explanatory statements) are as follows:

(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.* Stuttering won't disappear instantly with the understanding of this concept. It's a habit of years, and will take time to dissolve completely. You're not "beating the stuttering," you're just practicing your choice of letting unwanted thoughts go. As a result, the stuttering grows less and less frequent.

It takes confidence to change mental habits, and that comes from feeling "I'm okay." Because of the complexity and embarrassment of stuttering, it's easy to incorporate some "I'm not okay" attitudes (as evidenced by being unwilling to tell people you stutter.)

Let's face it. You and I got caught in stuttering. We both wish we hadn't, but we did. Well, that's no reason to feel not okay. Maybe the stuttering is not okay, but you are separate from the stuttering, and you are many things besides a stutterer; you have a right to feel okay. You have as much right to feel okay as any person on earth. While you're letting the stuttering die, take time to let this "I'm okay" feeling filter through your mind.

I'm not talking about a few affirmations of being okay. I mean this belief absorbed throughout the conscious and unconscious minds based on a truthful inward look. Open up to yourself. Sure, you stutter—so what! You've also got traits to be envied. You like people. You're honest. You've completed some difficult adventures. You're proud. Look at all your real

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feelings. If you see something you don't like, don't feel it as a negative; it's just something you want to change. Be 100 percent open; there's nothing to hide from. And when you can see yourself without self-deception, you're basing the "I'm okay" feeling on the truth...and that's permanent!

## *FACING THE UNKNOWN*

Years of habit become a lifestyle. To the stutterer, fear, tension, anticipation and relentless need for control guide our every move. Now you decide to give it up. Logically, you say "I want to give it up." But the inner mind wants to hold on. The fear, tension, anticipation and control are all it knows. Maybe they're bad, but at least they're familiar; and there's comfort in familiarity. You'll have to give up that comfort and enter a completely new way of thinking and living.

Don't let this hold you back. The journey is worth it. Others have done it. And since you feel okay, you deserve to make the change. You deserve to live the way you want.

Everything I've said so far is on a factual level. To give you an idea of how it feels to think the non-stuttering way, I'd like to share some thoughts and feelings I identify with.

- I feel totally aware and calm. I am aware of my actions and directions, but I'm simply floating from instant to instant, content to handle each situation as it arises.
  - The conscious mind is quiet. It used to be filled with an endless chatter of words. But now I choose what I want to think about, and "don't listen in" to the garbage thoughts. As a result, less words are passing through my thoughts in a given period of time.
  - My mind is not preoccupied with thoughts of attack or defense.
  - I've promised myself to float through life applying my true self to each situation as it arises. Sometimes I'm forced to play a role (e.g.: work image), but I am aware of the role, and play the role being myself as much as I believe I can.
  - I do not fear stuttering thoughts coming to mind because I know I can let them go. I say to myself, "That's just the stuttering mentality again," and I choose not to care about it or follow it.
  - I try to be totally involved with everything I do, but I'm not
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preoccupied with the results of my action.

- Sometimes I feel almost irresponsible or undirected by just floating from second to second, but I know that this is only by comparison to the highly anticipative and control-oriented thinking I used to have. It's correct now, and wrong before. This is supported by my greatly increased performance in everything I do (including work, where regimentation and order is expected.)
- I know that the stuttering is dying off, but I don't care one way or the other. Every so often I'll stutter, but it's such a rare occurrence that it doesn't matter. But I accept that it could happen; I just don't care. In fact, it's beyond my control anyhow whether I stutter. All I can do is let go of the anticipative and control-oriented way of thinking about speech. Certainly I don't want to fight the stuttering.
- I don't have to tell the world I stutter. But if I felt it were necessary to tell someone, I wouldn't hesitate because I'm OK.
- I have a right to live without unnecessary fear. Anyone who's willing to take the consequences of his lifestyle can make this decision. It's a choice.
- I never "rehearse" an upcoming conversation in my mind (anticipation and desire for control), nor do I avoid talking (because that's avoidance and I have a right to live without needless fear.)

## *FINAL NOTES*

Since control has been a large part of your thinking for years, it will be difficult to imagine how you can survive without controlling each moment. You may think that without control you'll float aimlessly and become mentally duggish. You may feel you'll walk unarmed into dangerous situations, or you'll walk into situations you can't handle. Don't be fooled; it's just your control and anticipation habits reasserting themselves.

The truth is that without the needled chatter in your head, you'll read situations with extra clarity and react from you're "I'm okay" being.

Don't fight and don't fear. Look forward to each new instant and enter it without fear. Go ahead.

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## AN INTERVIEW WITH JACK MENEAR: A PERSON WHO RECOVERED

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*[In the January 1982 issue of Letting GO the NSP published a paper by Jack Menear called "And the Stuttering Just Dies" which presented some unusual ideas on the mental habits associated with stuttering. The paper also detailed how a person could reverse these habits to become fluent without working on his speech per se.*

*Like many people, I was dying to find out how Jack had arrived at his insights and set out to track him down. My letter caught up with him in San Antonio, Texas, where he had recently moved, and where he was working as a real estate developer (though today he is back to his original vocation as a chemist). After suitable arrangements I conducted an hour and a half phone interview which I transcribed. We then ran the interview as a special insert in "Letting GO." This was the first time we had done this, but I thought Jack's story was exciting and particularly relevant to other NSP members.*

*Jack was the first person I had met who had completely mastered his stuttering problem. (Jack appeared not only totally fluent, but devoid of the kind of thinking characteristic of "fluent stutterers.") Even less frequently had I come across someone who could clearly articulate the step-by-step process that led to the solution of his stuttering behavior.*

*This is a long interview, and it will take you a little while to get through it. But I guarantee the trip is well worthwhile. You will be exposed to some radical thoughts about the essential nature of stuttering. And especially, you will discover the ways in which stuttering is a reflection of how a person lives his or her life. - JCH]*

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JOHN HARRISON: Tell me a little about your experiences as a person who stutters. How did you grow up? What was it like? How bad was your speech?

JACK MENEAR: I'd say it was really bad around junior high and high school days. It was bad enough in college so that I would sit in the classroom, and instead of asking a question, I would figure I'd read it later, you know. It was bad from that standpoint. I felt it was really restricting. And, like with most people, it cycled. Sometimes it was real bad and sometimes it was real good. It seemed like if I went out and was doing a lot of drinking with

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friends, I didn't stutter. And so I drank a lot. I didn't really tie that together before. I'd go out and get loose and I wouldn't care about it. It was usually to the point where I could control it. I could get to that calm spot and push my way through the words. But of course that's something that doesn't always work. That's the hard way to do it. You're always fighting. I never really solved my stuttering problem until just a few years ago. It was always there, and if I wasn't stuttering, I always had that tension, that anxiety. It was always there. Maybe I hid it from other people, but I was still stuttering inside.

JH: How did your stuttering manifest itself? Were they repetitions or quiet blocks?

JM: It could have been any of those. The truth is I never really got into a study of the symptoms. I just knew I couldn't talk.

JH: Was it because you were just blocked?

JM: There were times when I'd start to say something, and the first syllable would repeat a lot. But normally, if I couldn't say it, I couldn't say it.

JH: So it started in high school?

JM: I'd say junior high.

JH: Had you been disfluent as a kid?

JM: No. It literally started in junior high. I actually remember the first experience. It happened in geography class. There was another kid in the class that had a stutter. And I guess I must have thought -- "God, I hope that never happens to me." And one day in class I must have dwelled on that fear long enough that it got itself going. And a guy asked me a question and I couldn't answer it. It was pretty terrifying. And it got really bad for a long time. Really awful. Then like most people I fought for some control of it. And I got to an acceptable level. But you know I didn't really like going out much, and stuff like that.

JH: So it got in your way.

JM: Yeah, it got in the way of my social life.

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JH: What were the circumstances that led up to your particular insights and all the things that have happened since?

JM: Basically, what happened is that I just got teed off. I tried everything. I tried hypnosis. I did all this stuff, you know. Probably everything I tried gave a little bit of relief. But it was never permanent, and I never knew when this relapse would occur. It always seemed to come out of the blue. It wasn't there for a while, and then all of a sudden there it was. I just decided that I would change jobs. I would break my current social circle, so that I would spend an awful lot of time alone.

JH: What kind of a job did you have?

JM: I was a marketing guy. I got into marketing because I felt I needed to talk to people and that was my way of getting at it. But then I started this period of introspection. It was around Christmastime, and the people left the house I was living in. I realized that if I was going to change the stuttering, I was going to have to change a little of everything. I was going to have to become a different person.

JH: That's fascinating. Go on.

JM: What happened was I changed jobs, I moved. And this was the most difficult part. I didn't make new friends. The reason was that I was being really greedy with my time. I wanted my own time. Every night I wrote in my diary. Incidentally, I find it difficult to believe that anybody can break the stuttering habit without the direction of a diary. It's a very strong recommendation, because it ties things together. You see the trend.

JH: It helps you to be an observer of what's going on.

JM: Yeah. And since your goal is to not think about stuttering, you don't have to if you put it down on paper. You don't have to carry the thought in your head. If you did something right, you don't have to remember how you did it. It's accessible at any time. It's your permanent record of your past. And that was just incredibly invaluable. In fact I'm really teed off. Somebody stole my diary. I had everything written down, step-by-step, all the way through. The whole process. I haven't forgotten it, but it would have been nice to have saved a lot of that stuff. But anyhow, I would go home, and every evening I would really get into becoming very calm. And I started to be open to anything that was going on. I started to set directions, and figure out logically what I could do. A lot of it came by

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insight. You know, when you're very relaxed, a thought comes. I'd try to capture it on paper right away. Sometimes I didn't understand what it meant. And other times it felt like the pen was moving by itself, and I was just an observer. And out it would come. But slowly I started to put it together. It started to make more sense. But I would never really totally open up.

Then one night I was stretched out in the living room, and I started to think about the stuttering. It led me to all sorts of inner thoughts, and I finally got to one area where I felt that if I thought about it, I would go crazy. I remember that I had this visualization. There was this burning gate, and I knew if I walked through it, I'd go crazy. But I thought, screw it, I'm just tired of this. I'm going to walk through it anyhow. So I went through it, and I was still there. The relief I felt that night meant that I was no longer afraid to go after any thought. And with that, the stuttering started to die very, very quickly.

JH: How interesting. Was what you went into something of a personal nature in terms of an observation?

JM: Yeah. It was pretty personal. But at the time I didn't know what I was going to find there. It turned out the thought was totally innocuous. I mean, I don't think I even remember what it is any more. But it was a fear of looking. Once I got over the fear of looking, I realized that there was no thought that could hurt me.

JH: How old were you then?

JM: I was in my thirties.

JH: You're how old now?

JM: Thirty-eight.

JH: So you got to look at something you were afraid of. And it sounds like you became gradually more aware of yourself and what was happening, especially, what you might have been holding back.

JM: Exactly! It's interesting that you use those words. Because here's a thought that I wrote up for a guy I was working with some time ago. As far as I know this guy no longer stutters. We had some good conversations, and he left for about six months. He was going to school at Stanford,

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and just before he left school, he called me up and asked me if I'd like to have dinner with him. We had a very fluent conversation. It was beautiful. Here was the comment I had for him: "Without a clearly defined knowledge of inner feelings, uneasiness, anxiety and nervousness are natural." And then a parenthesis under natural: "Sometimes this appears as a holding back or a fearful worry about what's going to happen next." That's exactly your perception. Even your words are the same.

JH: If you use the word "stuttering," you're looking at the visible manifestation of the problem.

JM: Exactly.

JH: But if you use the words "holding back," you raise the question -- "What am I holding back?" -- and it encourages you to look deeper.

JM: That's why I liked the Thirteen Points ("13 Observations About People Who Stutter"—printed in the January 1982 issue of *Letting GO*). Because my article went only lightly into the idea of developing self-awareness. But I recognized that without thoughts like your "13 points" people will not be able to let go until they're willing to look at what's holding them back.

JH: You mentioned that you've been involved in the martial arts. I had a sense that your involvement helped to give you more insight into the nature of speech blocks. I wonder if you could comment on what you have learned from the martial arts that has helped formulate your ideas about stuttering.

JM: Truly the one thing that I learned was that instead of trying to write your script in life, just start giving it more fluidity. Just let it go.

JH: Just let the script write itself, so to speak.

JM: Let it write itself. You can still have plans and know where you want to go. But don't try and control each second. Don't try and control each conversation. Be more part of a bigger picture. Don't see yourself so much as the center. Now, that's very oriental in thinking. But in the martial arts you have to be that way. I guarantee that in a sparring match if you can mentally verbalize a thought while you're sparring, you're going to get beaten. But if you go out there and you have no thoughts in your head, you'll probably win. In other words, if you can consciously think when

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you're on the mat, if you can see a punch coming and register it consciously, you've just been hit. But if you let go, it will almost appear that your hand came up and blocked the punch at the same time that you saw it. So it gave me some insight about not thinking so much. Then I bought a pistol to explore my insight even further. In pistol shooting you're supposed to squeeze the trigger until it shoots. But if you try and anticipate when that gun is going to go off, your scores will be terrible. On the other hand, if you simply keep on the target and squeeze, and every time it goes off it's a surprise to you, you'll do great.

JH: Did you ever read a book called "Zen and the Art of Archery"?

JM: Yeah. It started me into pistols. I bought a bow, but the bow was too hard to pull. It was too much like work, but the pistol gave me the same message.

JH: An observation I've made is that people's speech habits are really an extension of their lifestyle. So when a person changes something basic, like how he thinks or how he relates to others, frequently his speech will change also.

JM: One thing that really helped was that I changed my posture. I would literally stand around the house, and I would assume the posture of a very confident person. I would see what that felt like. It felt very abnormal. When I stood with my shoulders wide, my head very erect and straight, my eyes with a very nice horizon to them, that was not a natural pose. It was the pose of a confident person. Then I would go back and assume my typical slumped position to see what that was telling me. It was a great teacher. In fact, I recently finished a series of ten rolfing sessions to work on this slumped posture left over from the stuttering. I took their ten sessions, and now I'm able to stand very straight naturally. (*Rolfing is a series of deep muscle massages designed to loosen the fascia that keep muscles locked in a particular "set."*-- JH.)

JH: Rolfing is something I've thought of doing.

JM: Oh, I would suggest it. Of all the things that I've done in my life, that certainly ranks with one of the memorable. The benefits will blow you away. Now when I stand in my natural position, it is reminiscent of the confident pose that I was playing with. You know, thoughts are reflected in your body...in your body-mind. I changed my mind, and I stopped the stuttering, but my body hadn't caught up yet. That was why I did the rolfing.

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Several evenings every week I used to do a lot of stretches, twists and hard exercises to straighten myself back up. But I realized that I really wanted to have somebody rearrange the tissues so I could naturally stand upright. I would strongly suggest it. I would like to talk to you after you've done it. You'll enjoy the hell out of it.

JH: I'm sure.

JM: I learned a lot from that. Anyhow, I guess what I'm saying is that there's a very strong relation between your physical posture, the way you stand, and how you think.

JH: What can you say to someone who doesn't know anything about rolfing, or for whom rolfing is not available?

JM: People made changes long before rolfing was around. All I'm saying was that that was a nice finishing touch.

JH: Have you been cognizant of the books on assertive training?

JM: I'm aware of them. I've never had to read them. I've always been relatively aggressive.

JH: What you say actually highlights my point, because there's a difference between assertiveness and aggressiveness.

JM: I would say that I was more assertive than aggressive. The stuttering could have stopped me from doing all the things I wanted to do. But I usually didn't let it stop me. I would do it anyhow. If I stumbled, that would just be tough.

JH: It sounds like that some of the things you did had a more aggressive nature, and that when you got in touch with those behaviors, you went from aggressive to assertive. Assertiveness can be quiet and laid back. It means basically being in touch with yourself as a person and your rights as a person, regardless of what anybody else is doing or saying.

JM: You know, maybe that's true. Because now I feel like I can just do what I want to do. I think the aggressiveness I had before was a kind of pushiness. I would kind of dig my feet in and say, "You're not gonna move me." That sort of aggressiveness.

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JH: The difference is that when you're being aggressive, it's usually at the expense of someone else.

JM: I've never been aggressive in that way. I've always been pretty sensitive to other people.

JH: I was, too. But, say, if I was going to ask someone for a pack of cigarettes, that would often feel like an aggressive act, rather than assertive one. Somehow in my mind I had formatted any self-assertion on my part as a threat to someone else. It's as if when I "won," the other person had to "lose."

JM Was this during the stuttering time, John?

JH: No, this was my nature as a whole.

JM: Then maybe it's a hangover from the stuttering. The stuttering mentality leads you to believe that each time you ask even a simple question, you have to struggle.

JH: I was always afraid of coming on too strongly with the other person. Being assertive was often seen as a confrontation, because I had confused assertiveness with aggressiveness. Do you remember the game "King of the Mountain"? That kind of mentality carried over to everything I did. Either someone else was on the mountain and I had to get him off, or I was on the mountain and they had to get me off. But after I went through a lot of the personal growth trainings, that view of the world changed to a world in which everyone had their own mountain. So that instead of a one-mountain world it was a world with infinite mountains and everyone had an opportunity to climb to the top of his.

JM: Yeah, that's a nice visualization. I can't remember specifically if I felt like that or not. At this point everything I've learned is kind of integrated.

JH: Did you notice other changes in your life as your speech changed?

JM: I began seeing a more holistic picture. After I got through the stuttering, I began to see how the mind restricts the body. The next thing I decided to do was to take the Bates system for improving eyesight. And now I see very well without glasses.

JH: How long did it take you to do that?

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JM: About a year and a half. It took a lot of effort and a lot of thinking. But sure as hell, all the same things were there. If I looked in your face and saw too much detail, that was being too aggressive. And so I just didn't see that. If I shifted my vision all over your face, that was intruding. You couldn't have that. It wasn't totally acceptable.

JH: How interesting.

JM: I wasn't the only one. That was a very common observation among the people in my class. They were not stutterers, but their vision was related to that sort of mentality. I used my stuttering experience to help me through that. The paper I wrote about how to get past stuttering—people understand it on an intellectual level, that's going to be their first hit. But if they get stuck on the intellectual level, nothing will happen. However, if they become submissive to the habit of letting thoughts go, stuttering will die. If you do the Bates exercises and understand *intellectually* how to shift your eyes, open your periphery and so on, it'll simply be an exercise that you periodically do in class. But if you take it on as a goal for the rest of your life, then your vision will improve.

JH: What commonality did you find in what you were doing with your eyes and with your speech?

JM: All the same picture. Holding back.

JH: You said before that your right eye was virtually blind.

JM: Yeah, it could perceive light patterns, but it couldn't discriminate...fully see. I simply saw with the left eye. If I talked to you, the right eye would squint. It would be shut most of the time, or almost shut. It wasn't doing anything. It was just kind of there. I still have more work to do in this. Because now that I have both eyes being able to see, my next job is to make them work together. I've got systems to do that now. I've got these playing cards. I wear this red lens and this green lens. And one eye can see one card and one eye can see the other. If I see both sides together, I've got both sides of my brain working. It's still a continuing thing, but both eyes do work now. I think we're getting off stuttering.

JH: Not really.

JM: But the thing that stopped the vision...I'd had bad vision before I

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stuttered, but when I look back as to what was necessary for the cure, it was the same mentality, the same holding back. The same inability to let something function the way it was meant to function. I was going to control it, right? I wasn't going to let the body work the way it was meant to work. I was going to do it. And that screwed everything up.

JH: Fascinating. You said some marvellous things just now. You just tied it all together. In our conversation yesterday, I mentioned that one of the observations I've made about the Precision Fluency Shaping Program is that if someone is ready to make a change, then the program really helps their speech...in part because of all the practicing they do after the course is over.

JM: I wouldn't call that practice. I would call that integrating it into your life.

JH: They literally have to practice a certain amount of time over the next year because they're learning how to relax certain muscles.

JM: The idea is to carry it into your everyday life, to make it part of you. When you do, it's no longer an exercise, it's your habit.

JH: The point is that you need to be at that stage in your life when you're really willing and motivated to take the next step, so to speak.

JM: I can see what you're saying.

JH: What I notice is that some people have not made this change in their life, so that even though they've acquired a new skill, they're constantly fighting that skill because it doesn't fit into how they see themselves.

JM: Right. To absorb that skill they have to give up something more familiar, and they won't do it. I stopped going around and giving talks on this, because I felt that it did not work. I would carry my article in and just talk to people. I would talk off that sheet, and then I would let them ask whatever questions they had. But it turns out that if I went looking to help them, no one got any help. But if they came looking for me... like one guy in particular, his name was Mark Gottlieb. Mark called me up one night and said he heard that I was going to give that talk and he really wanted to hear it but he couldn't make it that night. So he said would I send him a copy of that article. I sent it to him. He read it and called me right back, and said could he talk to me. We met for supper and talked about the article.

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He was primed to learn. He was really motivated. Interesting guy. He also had a lot of yoga background. So when I talked about letting thoughts go and being an observer, he was very tuned to that. He called me a couple of times afterwards to say he was having a little trouble here, here and here. And we talked about it, and got together for supper again. By that time he was getting very fluent. Then he disappeared for a few months. I saw him before he left, and he was totally fluent. But he came to me. He came looking. He was ready to change.

JH: He also had a point of view enhanced by yoga.

JM: I think his yoga helped him a lot. In fact, once I learned he was into yoga, I suggested something I did myself at the beginning. I called it calibrating my mind. Every morning I would practice the yoga concept of the blank mind. I think they call it looking at the candle...they've got a million names for it. You sit down and try not to have any thoughts. Of course, if you try to force the thoughts out of your mind, you just get more of them. But when you are content to simply sit in the eye of the hurricane, the thoughts die out. Then you can start to get mastery over your mind. He identified very strongly with that. And he did it; every morning he got up and for the first half hour he would go to the blank mind. The idea is to carry the blank mind through your life. If you can, you won't stutter, because you're not anticipating.

JH: You know, somebody pointed out recently about anticipation that it gets you out of touch with your present experience.

JM: Oh, absolutely.

JH: And the problem with being out of touch with your experience is that you can't effectively deal with what's happening. So your responses tend to be unconscious and automatic.

JM: I totally agree with that. If you're mentally verbalizing thoughts, you are no longer in the current experience. You are no longer able to experience fully what's going on. Because you're either in the past or in the future.

JH: Whereas when you're really *in* the experience, you're not even aware that *you* are talking. It's more like the talking just happens.

JM: Yeah, yeah. I don't think I'm quite at that stage. I wish I were. That's my

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ideal. I chase that one. I think I get better every year. I think that there are many, many levels to understanding that, and I think I've got a long way to go.

JH: I few months ago I got involved with an improvisation (acting) class that calls for the same kind of spontaneity. I could not have done that years ago because I'd think too much and get in my own way. Improvisation requires you to be willing to trust what comes up and just let it happen, no matter how foolish you feel at the time.

JM: You're exactly right. It's like we were saying, don't force the script, just live it. It goes all the way back to being comfortable...to your 13 common characteristics about people who stutter. If you know who you are, it's pretty easy to simply address yourself to each moment when it arrives. If you don't know who you are, you're not sure you can handle it.

JH: So it sounds like what you're saying is that it's hard to make changes without having at least a certain level of self-knowledge. Because without it you tend to work against yourself.

JM: Yes, there will always be some unknown factor inside you that's holding you back. If you don't have the guts to look inside...it's very difficult. I wish I knew how to tell people to do that. But if you block yourself through your feelings and your thoughts...your concept of who you are...my god, you can be just terrified of that. Anything unknown is terrifying. That's why I'm glad that your 13 points appeared in the same issue with my article. They really supplement each other. Because if people don't think about your 13 points, then what I wrote will simply be an intellectual exercise that people may say nice things about, but no one will gain from.

JH: We've been recommending that people do est or Lifespring (*These were personal growth programs that began on the west coast and became available nationally.—JH*) or one of the other growth trainings to begin to get a feeling for themselves as people. What I've noticed about people who stutter is that there seems to be an inordinate amount of unconsciousness about themselves as people. And especially, at the moment when a person stutters or blocks, there's a sense of panic and complete unconsciousness as to what's going on. People don't even know they're having feelings at that moment. They have this uncontrollable block, and they don't relate it to anything such as, well, I may be feeling something that I want to block and therefore I'm doing it in my speech. So

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the block seems to be an unattached phenomenon. Even people's language supports this, like—"I've been hit by a block."—as if somebody dropped it on them from the top floor, rather than the block being something that they're creating themselves.

JM: I've felt like this when I stuttered. No one can help me. No one can define it. It's coming from nowhere. Well, it wasn't coming from nowhere. I was creating it each time. I used to tell people when they would look at my article initially, I'm not proposing a way to cure stuttering. All I'm proposing is a way that you can stop creating it. Because you create it every time.

JH: Exactly. And what is fascinating—and this is also what people have a hard time getting—is that stuttering disappears as a by-product of doing something else.

JM: Absolutely. That's the whole point of what I tried to write. You don't attack stuttering. *You* change. And then the stuttering belongs to another mentality. Or a past life style. And if you have a remission where you fall back into it, look at what happened to your life, and you'll find that you just fell back into that same old mentality again. But if you can see it, if you can define it, you jump right back out again.

JH: So in that way the blocks, the stuttering can be a really good indicator of what's going on in your life...like some kind of dial or meter. So instead of seeing that as something to run away from, you look at it as something to use. It's your body talking to you. It's the same as getting a pain from doing too much exercise. Or a pain from not using your body right. Your body tells you things. And your speech, being part of your body, is also telling you things.

JM: It's a message, you know, for sure. In fact, I'm sure you must feel this way since you also brought yourself through this thing. You learned an awful lot about how your mind and body work. And I think this is an advantage. I can't say that I'm glad that I once stuttered, but being where I am now, I tend to feel like I have a very large advantage over a lot of people in terms of understanding myself. I think that there's a capability that you get from coming through it, and so anyone who undertakes this sort of work, their goal is going to be a lot more rewarding than just not stuttering. Their life is really going to get nice.

JH: What are some of the questions that people have asked you when you present these ideas to them, Jack?"

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JM: My most common question from people I've worked with a year and a half ago—they would say, "Look, how can I monitor my progress?" And that was a very serious question because, remember, you're not fighting symptoms. You're fighting the mentality that creates them. So you're succeeding when you're not thinking about stuttering. I was grossed out by the fact that people would talk about percent of fluency—that's bull! What they're doing is simply measuring a frequency of symptom. What you should really do if you want to monitor your stuttering is to take a hike in the mountains, take all day and go up to Muir Woods and hike. And if you spend all day thinking about the trees and nature and the plants and fresh air and sunshine, you've improved. Because you haven't thought about stuttering. If you come home and can put on your favorite album and get all the way through that album without thinking about stuttering, you've improved. So actually, the only real measure of your improvement is how well you can stay focused on what you're doing. That's how you measure it.

JH: What you seem to be saying is that the best way to deal with something you're afraid of is to do what often feels unnatural; that is, take the thing you're afraid of and simply put it aside. Let it be there, but don't become obsessed with it. Instead, focus your attention on the things you really want to do. Get caught up in useful details, like how you want go about accomplishing these things.

JM: When a fear thought comes by, if you take that fear thought and identify with it right at your center, it consumes you. And then you'll screw up because you're afraid. The other way is to say, "Oh yeah, that's a fear thought which is just the opposite of that other thought here, which is a success thought."

JH: And you simply notice it.

JM: You simply notice it's there and say, "Well, I'd rather go over here with this success thought." In other words, it becomes a choice, like other things in your life.

JH: It's the difference between "being" the thought and "having" it.

JM: Yes, very good. When you "be" that thought, it wins. It takes over your body. When you have good thought mastery, you can simply look at it, take from it and extract from it what you need, but it always remains

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just a thought.

JH: Another thing that's a killer is the label "stutterer." Talk about being it—labels are nefarious things, because they force you into a box with four walls and no door. Once you "are" something, there's no way out. Whereas, if you can change "stutterer" to a "person who stutters," you've changed the language from *being* the thing to *having* the thing. The difference between a person who sees himself as a stutterer and a person who sees himself as simply a person who sometimes stutters can really be illustrated by this example. If I talk for an hour, and I see myself as a stutterer, and I don't block, then I see that hour as an absence of something that should be there. Whereas, if I'm a person who stutters, and I talk for an hour without difficulty, then that's just how it is. I'm not aware of missing anything. There's not something I should be doing.

JM: That's why, in my last comment in my article, there are a lot of thoughts which are the flip side of the fear. And those thoughts are like—"Hey, I'm doing pretty damn good." It's murder. Because that will start the down cycle. You'll go to another trough the minute you think about that, because that reinforces the idea of—"Hey, I've escaped for an hour."

JH: Exactly, but your context, your frame of reference has not changed. The window through which you view the world has not changed. If you say, "Hey, I'm doing okay," you're still looking through the window of performance which says that I have to perform, and that there are a lot of things I do which aren't okay.

JM: Right. And the only thing you can do is just decide that you're going to change that way of thinking. People are what they think. So if you want to change, then change the thoughts that occupy your mind most of the time. Let's say one of the changes you want to make is take out the fear that you might stutter. There's a double fear there: *fear of the fear* of stuttering. That's the killer. So you need to say, "Okay, I've decided I'm not going to live with that any more. I know that I can't stop it from coming to my mind, but I'm simply going to stop becoming caught up in it."

JH: That sounds good. But a lot of times that's not enough unless you have something positive you can move towards. What I've been hearing is that through the various things you've done you've more than just absented yourself from that kind of thinking. You've moved toward a whole other kind of thinking in your life. Not just about speech, but in your

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life in general. I think that's an important thing that people need to know—that if they limit their change only to their speech, they're in trouble.

JM: If your whole life was only dedicated to giving up something about yourself that you don't like, it would probably fail. But if you decide that, hey, what I really want to do is move myself over here, this is my goal, this is my direction—this is where the diary helps. It helps you to find that direction. Then you have something to move towards. When I first understood that I was creating the stuttering myself, then I went to this blank mind concept. It was almost scary, because my mind felt like a vacuum. I mean, there wasn't anything going on in there. And I started to feel lonesome. I started to be a little afraid, because there was a void there. I had taken out what had consumed like 90% of my conscious thinking hours, and there was nothing there to replace it. And I said, well, if I don't get something in there, I'm really going to screw up. I thought the best thing I could do was read for a while. So I began reading in different areas. I went through quite a few books at that point. I tried to make them pleasure books, books that expanded my mind, books on adventure, things that might show me how other people perceive things. It led to some alternatives that were available to me. Even a fiction book is good for that. I certainly don't want to become macho man or something like, but I now have some alternatives. At that point I began to get totally involved in my job and my social life after work. And my life began to fill up.

JH: So your whole life gradually turned in a different direction and took on a different quality.

JM: I'm considerably different than I was at the point when I made that change. I look back, and there were some things that I really liked about myself. I think I had a better sense of humor back then, but I haven't lost it entirely. But I think part of that humor was that I was relatively insecure. Now at least when I'm having a good time, I know I'm having a good time. It was easy back then to follow more powerful people, because I didn't have to decide, and I didn't have to propose a plan. And sometimes it was difficult to say no. I found that more or less I was being whipsawed around by what other people wanted, rather than what I wanted. A big change was that I decided to take that part myself.

JH: That's part of the change in being assertive.

JM: Basically, what I had seen was that when things were going well in my

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life, it was very easy to let go and employ this technique that I had worked out for myself, but when things weren't, it got really tough. I would hide from the negative or sad or emotionally drained feelings. I'd just push them to the background and cover them up with happy feelings. I don't do that any more. If something is going badly, if I feel saddened by something, I just feel it. Sometimes I'll actually come home and just cry the thing out if that's necessary and *feel* what it's like to be sad. That's a valid feeling, too. Like, get into it. Go through the thing. And it, too, will pass. But when you come out, it means that you've lived the bad times second to second just like you've lived the good times. And there's no reason why you should go back into stuttering because times are bad. If you're living second to second, if you're just flowing with this life trend, you flow through it in good times *and* in the bad times. You're complete.

JH: Was this something that you didn't do when you were younger?

JM: There's no way I'd have done this. I always hid from sad feelings.

JH: So you went along with only what made you comfortable, and whatever you didn't like you blocked out. My guess is that a major way you blocked out bad feelings was in your speech...since speech is the major way to communicate feelings.

JM: Undoubtedly that had to be it. And I think I still have a lot to learn about that. I'm still having a little bit of trouble feeling the emotions of true sadness and rage. Rage and anger.

JH: Common problem with people who've grown up with a stuttering problem.

JM: Right now I've joined a school to do some full contact karate, just to get back in the game a little bit. And obviously, I don't show rage when I'm on the mat. But I'll come home and practice it. I have a punching bag here. I'll get myself just worked up like a sunofabitch and just hit that thing as if I wanted to kill it. And I feel it...as if I want to kill it. Just to see what it feels like. I don't have to do it every day, and I don't have to unleash that on another person. But feeling is valid. And hiding from anger is just as bad as hiding from anything else. They're all valid. You should be able to feel everything. And I think there's still a couple of holes in my program that at least I'm aware of.

JH: How did you get in touch with the need to feel all these things? That's

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a major shift in philosophy.

JM: It came from the “night of the burning gate.” When I went through that gate, I was still there. I realized that I had walked through a fear of taking a look. And at that point there was nothing to hide from any more. So I just let these thoughts surface as they would, and I probably filled up two diaries in a matter of a month. I would go home and write for hours, as this stuff just started pouring out. It was a release. I would think—“If that thought appears, I will at least follow it to make sure I’m not hiding from it. I will just follow it until I think I understand it. And then I’ll just drop it again and let it be a part of me from now on.” That was the starting point. Like anything else, there are levels of understanding. I began to understand a little bit more about the acceptability of different feelings.

JH: You know what my starting point was? The year that I graduated from college I was working for my father’s ad agency in New York. I was working in the mail room. They had a black telephone that went directly to the photostat house. And several times a day I had to pick up the phone and say “pickup.” You know, the p’s were always a bear. But I’d keep trying. One day I picked up the phone—I probably had had a good day and was feeling more confident. The guy on the other end got on with his gruff voice and said, “Yeah?” I mustered up every bit of concentration I had and relaxed all my muscles and kept talking and said “backup,” and I said it without blocking. What I noticed was that when I didn’t block, I had a huge rush of fear. For the first time I realized that the block served a function, which was to keep those feelings out of my awareness where I wouldn’t have to experience them, let alone deal with them. That was my threshold experience.

JM: Then you see it. You see that stuttering is a mechanism to stop you from being able to go inside. It’s like it has a purpose. As I remember, when I used to stutter, when I went into the stutter, there was a complete block of everything. There was a total insensitivity to everything that happened until I was done.

JH: What it is is a sense of panic. It’s a total unconsciousness about what’s going on.

JM: That’s really true. It’s total tension. Total insensitivity.

JH: So part of what you have to do is to assist people, first of all, in staying conscious. Somebody will stand up and they’ll be really tight, and they’ll

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say, "Well, I don't want to talk any more because I feel foolish." So we say, "Okay, can you talk a minute more and make it okay to feel foolish, really get in touch with those feelings, just let them be there." So the person says, "Well, okay." And they'll talk a little more, and then they'll say, "Now I'm feeling like I'm too aggressive." So we say, "Okay, can you allow those feelings to be there, too. Just let 'em be there, stay in touch with them. Really be in touch with them and continue talking." Well, what happens, magically, is two things. Number one, they suddenly find themselves talking without blocking, and secondly, the quality of their voice, what a psychologist calls the "affect," the feeling level, magically transforms. Suddenly, instead of being tight and rigid and constricted there's a fullness to their voice, because their feelings are coming out. It's simply a question of allowing people to recognize what's going on and staying in touch with it while they're talking.

JM: You know, I think once people open up, if they're going to live their feelings, then they're on their way. If you're not afraid of your feelings, then they can't hurt you. And they start to become valuable.

JH: Feelings are just feelings, you know. Have you done any of the growth trainings like est or Lifespring?

JM: I never did any of that, but I read an awful lot.

JH: These are very experiential types of things. One of the things they've helped me realize is that I can feel anything. I can cry. I can get angry. All kinds of things.

JM: That took me a long time to get over that one.

JH: I think for a lot of men it's tough. And for people who stutter it's even tougher. My feelings are a lot more accessible now. And consequently my self image is a lot broader because I've accepted a lot more in.

JM: Exactly. Certainly from the time I saw what was going on until now I like life a lot better—more than I ever did back then. There's just more to it. More to enjoy. More to do. More to be.

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## FROM STUTTERING TO STABILITY

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by Linda Rounds

**I**magine that it is tomorrow morning, and like all other mornings, you wake up to face another day as a person who stutters. You begin your normal morning routine that in all appearances resembles any non-stuttering person's morning routine. In fact, the only difference in your routine and a non-stutterer's routine is what is occurring in your mind. While the person who does not stutter is worrying about what to wear and whether they are having a bad hair day, you are scanning ahead in your mind at what speaking threats might be awaiting you. You immediately feel anxious and fearful and begin to plan out how you can avoid threatening situations. The day plays out as you expected. You were able to avoid some situations, others you were not. By the time you arrive home at night you are emotionally drained and have expended all your energy trying to keep your stuttering problem at a minimum or hidden all together.

But when you arrive home, what if on this particular evening something new happens, and you are handed the emotional tools to immediately control the stuttering? Too good to be true? Another empty promise?

Not so fast, it really happened.

I began stuttering at the age of five, and by the age of seven I was proficient at it. I was fully equipped with every emotion and belief necessary to be good at stuttering. I carried those emotions and beliefs with me everywhere I went, even as I proceeded into adulthood. During my childhood school years, once a week, instead of being allowed to go outside to play at recess time, I was often whisked away to speech therapy. In high school my well-meaning teachers felt I would overcome stuttering by providing me ample speaking opportunities in front of the class. Their intentions were good but their actions left me feeling even more inadequate and fearful. It became clear to me that not only did I perceive myself as being different from the other kids, but the adults perceived it also.

Then as a young adult I enlisted in the Army for four years to help pay for my college education. The Army recruiter promised that the Army could help me overcome stuttering. What he didn't tell me was that their technique was to scare the stuttering right out of me. None of these methods were very helpful.

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When I was 19 years old, I made the most meaningful decision of my life. No, I am not talking about marriage, although that is very meaningful. I am talking about the decision to become a Christian. From that point on, my perspective of life and the world did a 180-degree turn. However, becoming a Christian did not end my stuttering, and the disappointment I felt over God's seeming lack of concern about my speech problem was no small matter through the years. But I will revisit that issue a little further on.

Now, you would think that most people who stutter would avoid professions that require a lot of speaking. This is probably true, however, for some unknown reason, 12 years ago I was drawn to a profession that not only required a lot of speaking but also a lot of public speaking. In actuality, it is due to the dynamics of my profession that set me on a relentless path to overcome stuttering.

## *PREVIOUS TREATMENT*

Before I go on to how I moved from stuttering to stability, I think it is noteworthy to mention that I have tried some of the more popular treatments for stuttering with minimal success. After becoming very disenchanted (and thousands of dollars poorer), I began doing research on my own to see if I could discover the key to unlocking the mystery behind my stuttering. You see, I have always been bothered by the theories that stuttering is caused by a physical defect in the speaking mechanism and/or brain. It made me feel disempowered, like my only hope was to wait until they invented a magic pill that would cure stuttering. It also did not take rocket science to figure out that my speech mechanisms were in good working order since even my most difficult words could be spoken fluently in certain situations. And then there was that ever-present anxiety that always preceded the stuttering. Hmmm, I wonder what would happen if there were no anxiety?

This is where the story gets really interesting. One day several months ago I was surfing around on the National Stuttering Association's web site when I spotted the book *How To Conquer Your Fears of Speaking Before People* by John C. Harrison. I ordered the book, and when it arrived I immediately began devouring its contents. The first part of the book talked about specific techniques that people who stutter could use to be an effective public speaker. While this portion of the book was good, it was the second portion that was like a breath of fresh air.

The second part reflected John's feelings about stuttering, including the premise that if you are trying to solve a problem without making headway, chances are that you are trying to solve the wrong problem. He felt that many stuttering treatments are not inclusive enough to fully describe the

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full dynamics of what drives stuttering. John went on to describe what he has termed the “Stuttering Hexagon,” an interconnected system comprised of six points: physical behaviors, emotions, perceptions, beliefs, intentions, and physiological responses. Every point is connected to every other point.

John explained that if a person who stutters has previously been working on one point of the Hexagon, such as speech production, but has not worked to change any of the other points such as emotions or beliefs, those other parts will continue to have a negative affect on the system as a whole. They will continue to throw the entire system off, leaving the person vulnerable to stuttering. So each point must be effectively dealt with. He also contended that to make the stuttering disappear you can’t focus on solving it; you must focus on dissolving it. In other words, to remove the problem you must destroy its structure.

John’s Stuttering Hexagon was the most accurate description of the mystery behind stuttering that I had read to date. And the fact that after 25 or 30 years of stuttering he was able to defeat it himself gave me the final boost I needed to know that I, too, could overcome stuttering.

As excellent as John’s book was, however, it was never intended to be a therapy program or provide techniques for becoming more fluent. So at the end of the book I was left with the question, “How do I get all of the points on the Hexagon positively biased?” Little did I know that shortly I would discover the answer.

## *NEURO-SEMANTICS*

Throughout his book John recommended several other books to read, one of which was *Awaken the Giant Within* by Anthony Robbins. Reading Anthony Robbins’ book was my first introduction to Neuro-Linguistics Programming (NLP). Eventually this book led me to *The User’s Manual for the Brain*, which is a comprehensive manual covering the NLP Practitioner course and is written by Bob G. Bodenhamer, D.Min. and L. Michael Hall, Ph.D., cofounders of Neuro-Semantics (NS).

As I was reading the books on NLP I became very excited about the potential of these techniques in getting the Stuttering Hexagon to become positively biased as it related to my inability to speak fluently. Practicing some of the techniques in *Awaken the Giant Within* proved to be mildly helpful. But I remained hopeful that this could ultimately be the mechanism that would throw me into speech stability. I felt that if I could just work with someone trained in Neuro-Linguistic Programming, that they might be able to walk me through the techniques that would prove most effective in getting me past my stutter.

My opportunity presented itself when midway through *The Users*

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*Manual for the Brain*, the authors gave a web site address for Neuro-Semantics. The next day I visited the sight and discovered that they provided private consultations. BINGO!!! I e-mail Bob Bodenhamer and requested a consultation with him.

When I received an e-mail back from Bob indicating his willingness to work with me, I was ecstatic. He indicated that he had limited experience with four or five clients who stuttered but had obtained successful outcomes utilizing the skills of Neuro-Linguistic Programming and Neuro-Semantics. Bob also felt that he stood a real chance of helping me over the phone, which alleviated the necessity of my flying to North Carolina to meet with him. We set up the first phone consultation for the following Friday.

### *WHAT IS NEURO-LINGUISTIC PROGRAMMING?*

Neuro-Linguistic Programming is a model that helps you take charge of running your own brain by identifying disempowering thoughts, values, beliefs and perceptions and restructuring them to be more empowering. Neuro-Semantics works with the higher level thought processes. It specifically involves our thoughts/feelings about our thoughts, emotions, memories, imaginations, perceptions, beliefs, etc. (i.e., fearing the fear of stuttering).

Bob sums up one of the major concepts of NLP/NS in his statement, "In NLP/NS we hold the belief that each person has all the resources that they need in order to 'fix' any cognitive (thinking) based problem they may have."

I don't know about you but that is music to my ears.

It is important to understand that Neuro-Semantics utilizes the person's own resources to bring about change. Everybody, regardless of his or her station in life, operates from a belief system. We reference this belief system in determining our self-esteem, our personal limitations, our viewpoint on the meaning of life, how others view us, what we can and cannot accomplish in life, and every other judgment we make about ourselves, others and the world we live in. There are as many belief systems as there are people. In assisting individuals to overcome cognitive problems, Neuro-Semantics first attempts to discover the person's unique belief system and then utilizes it to bring about change.

### *SETTING THE STAGE*

Let me tell you about the day I was handed the emotional tools to immediately control stuttering.

The first tool was actually given to me by Bob through an e-mail he sent

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me on the day I requested a consultation with him. He had already determined through a previous e-mail that I held a strong Christian belief system and therefore, he used that system to bring about a change in how I perceived things relating to stuttering.

He said, "I do believe that there is a great chance of taking care of this through phone consultations and e-mail. For what will happen when your fear, anxiety and/or phobia comes into the presence of God?"

When I first read that e-mail my initial response was shock. Then laughter as I immediately envisioned a picture of three teeny, tiny men called Fear, Anxiety, and Phobia shrinking back and cowering in the awesome presence of God. Bob had effectively used my belief in God to reframe my thoughts of fear, anxiety, and phobia by forcing them together, knowing full well that my beliefs would not allow the two to reside together.

*(Notation from Bob Bodenhamer: In NLP/NS we hold the belief that each person has the resources needed for his or her own healing. We also believe in utilizing each individual's resources. We do not judge the resources; we simply use them.*

*In Linda's case, her highest resources were her Christian faith. I have learned over the years that a person's religious beliefs usually provide the most effective resources, and that when they are applied to the problem state, the person will experience the greatest healing. However, even if you do not hold any religious beliefs, we believe you already have adequate resources to overcome any cognitively based problem you may have. The reason — every individual maintains high level beliefs, values, etc. that make for excellent healing resources.)*

## THE CONSULTATION

Then came the phone consultation. After a brief period of getting acquainted, Bob zeroed in on the feeling of anxiety that is so familiar to me and to so many others who stutter. He utilized a technique called "The Drop Down Through Technique" which has its foundation in the works of Alfred Korzybski in his classic work *Science and Sanity*. [This is a seminal work that outlines the ground rules for general semantics, a discipline that shows how our thinking and life experiences are shaped by the way we use language.] The technique is designed to address unconscious thoughts like those that drive stuttering. The following transcript is taken from Bob's therapy notes.

In our first phone conversation I associated the client into her anxiety, which simply means I had her really feel the anxiety. She had a "heavy and tightening" feeling in her stomach, a feeling she described as "holding back." Now move that up to the muscles that control the vocal cords and you have

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stuttering.

From her position of experiencing this “heavy and tightening” feeling in her stomach I asked her to drop down through that feeling.

BOB: What do you feel underneath that feeling?

LINDA: I feel fear. Fear is there! (Note that here we have a thought of fear, which ties right into anxiety.)

BOB: Drop down through the fear. What do you feel under the fear?

LINDA: Nothing. I don’t feel anything.

BOB: Good. Now, just imagine yourself opening up the “nothingness” and drop down through and out the other side of the nothingness?

LINDA: I see people. It is a little bit scary. They are watching me. They are expecting me to say something.

BOB: Yes. And, what does that mean to you?

LINDA: Well, I have a sense of wanting to go away and hide.

BOB: OK. That makes a lot of sense to someone who tends to stutter when she speaks to a group of people. Now, just drop down through that thought-feeling. What do you feel below that?

LINDA: Ummh. I feel safe. I feel pretty safe now.

BOB: You are doing really great now. That is good, and it is going to get better. Now, just drop down through the feeling of being safe. What or who is underneath that?

LINDA: I feel contentment. I feel alone but safe.

BOB: Now, just drop down through that feeling of contentment and safety. What or whom do you feel below that?

LINDA: Warmth. Total acceptance! I feel total acceptance. There is no judgment here. I see a yellow light.

BOB: Great. Is the light really bright?

LINDA: Yes, it is. It is very bright.

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“Yes, I know it is very bright. And, who said, “He is the light of the world?”

LINDA: Jesus.

BOB: That is right and He is there isn't He?

LINDA: Yes, it is God. He is the Bright Light.

BOB: Very good, and just be right there with God in the presence of warmth and total acceptance. Now, what happens to the anxiety in the presence of God?

LINDA: It is gone.

BOB: What happens to the fear in the presence of God?

LINDA: It is gone.

BOB: What happens to the sense of wanting to go and hide in the presence of God?

LINDA: It is gone.

BOB: Yes, they are all gone, aren't they?

LINDA: Yes, they are.

BOB: And, in the presence of God, what happens to stuttering?

LINDA: It is gone.

BOB: Yes, and being there in the presence of God, notice what you see, hear and feel. Put a word or a phrase to that state so that when you recall that word or phrase you will immediately go into the presence of God. Anytime you have a sense that you might stutter, just go into the presence of God and you will get total control of the stuttering.

Bob utilized my beliefs by having me “bring the negative thoughts into the presence of God” which forced me to apply my faith and belief in an all-powerful God where, to me, each of those thoughts can't possibly reside.

After we had completed this technique, Bob had me remember the first time I felt the anxiety related to stuttering. My first memory of feeling the anxiety was with my mom. From my experience, my mom was unhappy with my stuttering, and as a child I could easily detect her dissatisfaction with my speaking ability. Bob reframed this memory, which effectively removed the impact of those past perceptions.

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## EARLY RESULTS

How did this work in the following days after the 45 minute call with Bob? Well, I kept track. The following Monday and Tuesday at work I had nine occasions where anxiety set in. Eight of the nine times I used the technique Bob utilized during our consultation session, and the words flowed as smooth as butter. However, one time I encountered a block that just came out of nowhere (no warning, just wham!).

The progress was amazing, but now I wanted to ensure that the surprise blocks would not happen any longer. So I scheduled another session with Bob for the following Wednesday evening. We spent an hour on the phone that evening working through some issues that I had no idea had buried their tentacles into the foundation of the stuttering. They had nothing to do with stuttering per se but everything to do with the anxiety behind the stuttering. The issues came up while Bob was trying to determine what specifically I was doing to trigger the speech block. I had indicated that my biggest challenge was speaking in front of groups as opposed to one-on-one conversation.

We uncovered various emotions associated with speaking before groups such as feeling outnumbered, out of control, vulnerable and exposed. But becoming fully conscience of those feelings caused only a minor amount of discomfort. There were other, deeper feelings that were not as easy to deal with. As Bob worked with me to discover the “other” thoughts, they eventually came screaming to my conscience mind. My mind immediately began an internal war of “to tell or not to tell.” After what seemed like a very inappropriate amount of hedging around in response to Bob’s question, I came to the conclusion that if I ever wanted to be 100 percent free of stuttering, I was going to have to step out on a limb and be willing to deal with uncomfortable thoughts and feelings.

I knew I could skirt the issues, hang up, and continue having a certain level of problems in my speech, or I could meet them head on and overcome the stuttering. The issues, although not the cause of my stuttering, certainly played a part in creating and maintaining the stuttering system. By refusing to experience what was going on during those moments I was constantly giving them the power to fuel my speech blocks.

One of the great things about Neuro-Semantics is that it is not necessary to discuss the specifics of a given situation. (Because our brain works more from structure than content, the NS Practitioner usually needs very little content to assist the client in resolving the issue.) I never had to reveal much more than just the high level aspects of the issues. But I did have to be prepared to deal with the thoughts in my mind. That is not always easy. However, going back to John’s Stuttering Hexagon, the thoughts had to be

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effectively “reframed” in order to get all the points on the hexagon positively biased. The surprise blocks probably would never have gone away without effectively dealing with all of the issues behind the anxiety and fear.

For the remainder of the session Bob utilized specific Neuro-Semantic techniques to help bring about desensitization of the thoughts and beliefs I had developed from as early as five years old. By the end of the session we had discovered that anger toward some of the events surrounding my childhood was very apparent, what was even more significant was the anger I felt towards myself as a child. In essence, I blamed myself for my inadequacies and the things that went wrong in my youth. The session came to an end, and we set up another appointment for the following week.

What is interesting is that after this session the speech blocks totally disappeared. The issues had not been completely resolved but apparently enough had been dealt with to cause the blocking to disappear. I still had many of the same familiar thoughts, and occasionally I would get the physical sense that I would stutter or block, but I never did. In essence the physiological aspects were still present which Bob later explained was a result of the muscles still being neurologically programmed (another point on the Stuttering Hexagon). I am not sure, but I would venture to say that the stuttering may have eventually returned if we had not taken the time to deal with the anger I felt toward myself as a child.

Before I move to the third and final session it would be good to mention that during the three weeks I had been having phone consultations with Bob I was also reading *Games For Mastering Fear*, also by Michael Hall and Bob Bodenhamer. In my reading, I came upon their discussion of Cartesian Logic. This is a way to challenge a person’s thinking and is composed of four questions, the last being, “What wouldn’t happen if you did not keep your phobia (i.e. stuttering)?”

I answered the first three questions with relative ease, but once I got to that final question, I had a difficult time coming up with the answer until, out of nowhere, the statement, “It wouldn’t keep people away from me” came slamming into my conscious mind. I was stunned trying to figure out where that came from. It was an almost laughable statement to me because I have always enjoyed being surrounded by people. But as quickly as the statement came to me, I realized exactly what it meant.

The four questions from Cartesian Logic are most effective in critical thinking. In the context of stuttering, ask yourself:

1. What will happen if I continue stuttering?
  2. What will happen if I stop stuttering?
  3. What will not happen if I continue stuttering?
  4. What will not happen if I do not stop stuttering?
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Trust your unconscious mind to give you the answers. Sometimes it is good to let someone else ask you these questions so you can concentrate on processing the answers.

Although people play a very important part in my life, I had learned early in life to keep most of my deepest thoughts and feelings private. Now I was remembering the many times people who have crossed my path had made comments on how “private” I was in sharing personal thoughts and feelings.

Stuttering was a way to keep people I loved in my life...but at a safe distance. I was caught in a divided intention. On one hand, I wanted to speak to please my friends and family, but on the other, I wanted to hold back to please myself and feel safe. This ultimately resulted in experiencing speech blocks.

From there I was able to go back and evaluate the reason why I felt I needed to maintain so much privacy and also if it was something that was still a valid behavior to keep today. My conclusion was that as an adult, I do not need to protect myself from others by holding myself back in the same way I did as a child. I also have the ability to evaluate on a different basis what should be shared and what should be kept private. The rules of my childhood are no longer valid.

### *THE FINAL SESSION*

Now on to the final session. During this session, Bob and I directly dealt with the anger I felt towards myself as a child. The session was the most difficult of the three. Bob had me go back and visit the little girl at age seven. He asked me to imagine her being in the presence of God but initially I was unable to do so because I felt she did not deserve to be with him. In fact, I felt that God himself would not want her there with him.

I knew in my head how ridiculous my thoughts were, but my emotions were filled with anger and contempt for the little girl. Eventually, Bob was able to find a way to get me to imagine the little girl being in the presence of God, but it remained unnatural, and I despised her invading my relationship with God.

Then we shifted gears. Now the focus was on how the little girl felt. My comment to Bob was that she was “madder than spitfire.” When Bob asked what or whom she was mad at, the inadequacies and events of the past were mentioned, but the real anger she was feeling was directed at the grown up me. She was angry that I was blaming her and that I refused to get on with my life. She wanted me to quit placing so much emphasis on the events of the past and to simply start being the adult. Wow!

After 30 minutes, Bob cut off the session to allow me time to process

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what had just occurred. That was a major turning point. The next day I sent Bob the following e-mail message:

After we hung up I had a lot of thoughts running through my mind. I thought of my seven-year-old niece. The day she was born she owned my heart. I desperately loved her and silently vowed to do everything in my power to ensure that she would never experience the same events and inadequacies that I experienced.

Then I came to realize that I did not have the power to completely protect her. Even my sister and brother-in-law did not have full power to protect their own daughter. So I determined to do what God did give me the power to do...to unconditionally love her no matter what happened, to be her advocate throughout life, to encourage, and to help teach her how to love God and other people.

Then I began to wonder why I am able to love my niece so deeply regardless of what happens to her. If anything ever happened to her to make her feel inadequate, I would just want to hold her tight until the pain went away. Seems to me there should be no difference between my seven-year-old niece and myself as a child.

I see myself looking back 31 years at myself as a little girl, and I am shouting, "Pack your bags and get out of my life!" The little girl is looking forward 31 years and shouting, "Grow up, you're the adult! The answer is not back here!"

It dawned on me that she is right. No matter how many times I replay the tapes of the past, I won't discover the answer from a little girl. The little girl did the best she could with the resources she had. There are no answers in her mind. She is too young.

So I shout back down to her again, "Hold on, I'm coming back there."

Now the little girl is smiling. I, being 38 years old and operating with a strong belief system, begin to move back toward her. When I reach her, I welcome her in my arms and give her the same love that I would give to my niece.

I whisper to the little girl, "It was never about you." Then I move forward and visit that little girl at each stage in her life where she felt inadequate, and I repeat the same process.

So right now I feel better about that little girl. I don't know what tomorrow will bring, but today I not only look like an adult, I also think like one.

My first phone conversation with Bob took place on January 18, 2002. The immediate results were amazing. My second phone conversation was

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January 23, 2002. I have not experienced a speech block since that time. My third phone conversation was on January 30, 2002. I have not been angry at that little girl since.

In closing, I would like to mention that for me Neuro-Semantics was a very effective tool in getting the remaining points on the Hexagon in a positive mode. Although I believe that Neuro-Semantics can assist a great majority of people who stutter, I equally believe that the quick results I received were due in part to the work I had been (unknowingly) doing through the years, like attending self-help seminars, keeping journals, researching homeopathic treatments, and reading an endless amount of books. All of these contributed in getting the points on the Hexagon positively biased.

I have learned that the roots of the problem may be different for each individual, but the symptoms (anxiety, fear, muscle tension in the vocal cords and stomach, etc.) and the outcome (stuttering and blocking) appear to be the same. If, as suspected, emotions such as fear and anxiety are critical components of the Stuttering Hexagon, then Neuro-Semantics provides some useful tools for alleviating these unconscious negative emotions and effecting major changes within the entire stuttering system.

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Those wanting to know more about Neuro-Linguistic Programming and Neuro-Semantics can access the International Society of Neuro-Semantics website at <[www.neurosemantics.com](http://www.neurosemantics.com)>.

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## STRATEGIES FOR DEALING WITH STUTTERED FEELINGS, SPEECH AND COMMUNICATION.

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by Mark Irwin, D.D.S.

I've stuttered since the age of four, but I managed to make my way by hiding it — substituting, avoiding and pretending ignorance whenever I was asked a question. But by age 24, when I began my private practice as a dentist, my speech was terrible. In those days I saw myself in a lose-lose situation. I could feign ignorance to a patient's question (my only available "survival" strategy, since it was difficult to substitute scientific and anatomical terms.) But displaying ignorance to a patient question seemed to me as bad as stuttering.

By age 30 I was seeing between 10 and 16 patients per day. During the day, I would speak as little as possible, leaving it to staff to deal with all phone calls and patient interaction. Nevertheless, in my first years of practice my speech did improve slightly, and as a result, I began to notice something quite significant.

On any given day my fluency would vary from patient to patient. In conversing with the very young, very elderly and very nervous, I was relatively smooth, but with the highly impatient, fast talking and demanding businessmen, I still had serious difficulty. Between these two extremes there was a range of correlated speech success.

Eventually, it became obvious to me that my speech was a function of how I perceived the interaction between myself and the other person. My blocking seemed to be more about my perceptions than my physiological ability to produce speech (I could speak quite well when talking to myself.) Consequently, I felt that if I could change those perceptions, then I could change my speech.

### *HOW I WENT ABOUT IT*

**I became more assertive.** It was silly, but even though I was the dentist, I had to realize I had as much right to be there and could take as much time as suited me. I had been giving away my power to the patient, and I had been doing quite the same thing in my interactions with people outside my work.

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My strategy was to choose to watch assertive people (either directly or through television and film) and to spend time with them, knowing that their attitudes would rub off. Learning by observation was extremely important for me.

**I increased my self-esteem and self-confidence.** I set out to know more, read more, take more courses. My issue was communication. I read all I could about body language, improved my English expression by studying grammar and developing my vocabulary, and furthered my general knowledge by studying psychology, anthropology and history. I figured that if I was going to speak well, I also needed to have something to speak about. And having more knowledge would improve my confidence.

**I focused on what I could do right in the communication process, not what I was doing wrong.** I stopped obsessing on my dysfluencies. I learnt to smile more, relax, listen, and breathe at the same time!

**I monitored my anxiety level in relation to that of the other person.** I developed this technique, which I called Controlled Emotional Response. I would simply focus on connecting with the emotional response of the person to whom I was communicating (rather than worrying about how I was performing!) by giving *them* a score from zero to 10 as to how anxious I perceived them to be. I would then focus on relaxing sufficiently so as to achieve a score that was equal to, if not less than, that for myself. In doing this, I was able to stand guard and stop the old uncontrolled feelings of anxiety from overwhelming me like they had always done. I was also taking the stress off myself by focusing on someone else. In addition, paying attention to what the other person was feeling also helped me in the communication process.

**I restructured negative associations.** I used positive replay. If for some reason I had had a negative experience, rather than beat myself up about it (like I had always done in the past), I would replay the situation in my mind. But this time the replay was changed to have me perform positively; that is, to perform in the way I would have preferred and certainly in the way I would like to when again I found myself in a similar situation. In this way I trained myself to give an automatic positive response when presented again with the same situation.

**I lowered my resting level of anxiety.** I developed a technique for what I call speaking with POISE that involved meditation and self-hypnosis. Have you ever noticed how some people seem to be more relaxed than others? I have, and I resolved to become more relaxed myself. I felt that I had been anxious for so long that a hyper anxiety state had become part of me. I was so used to being anxious that being anxious was normal for me. So I studied meditation and self-hypnosis and developed a mantra for myself.

**Meditation.** I started in a chair in a quiet room and practiced relaxing.

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Ideally, it's good to ideally do this three times a day. If you return to that chair each time, the chair will soon become associated with relaxation, making it easier to enter a deeper state of relaxation and to enter that state more and more quickly each time you sit there. While in that chair, focus on the tip of a candle flame until you "see" a line of energy between your eyes and the candle flame. Breathe in the energy from that flame, calling it in turn poise, strength and self-confidence. Breathe out stress anxiety and confusion. A variation is to "see" stress, anxiety and confusion being bundled in a canoe, floated over a waterfall and drawn out to sea...way out of your life!

**Self-hypnosis.** I would start out by sitting that same favorite chair and calling to mind several people who I regarded as outstanding communicators. Then I read myself the following passage. "As you become...and as you remain...more confident and relaxed each day...so you will become more confident and relaxed in the presence of other people...no matter whether they be few or many...no matter whether they be friends or strangers.

"In everyday life...you will enjoy opportunities to speak...and do so with intonation and rhythm and breath support...so as you speak you will become completely relaxed both mentally and physically...quite calm and composed. If...at any moment...you should begin to feel difficulty with a particular word..., you will stop speaking immediately for a moment or two.... And during that brief period of silence, the muscles of your face... your throat...your tongue and your lips...and the muscles of your chest will relax completely...so that when you speak again the difficult word slips out easily. You will cultivate the habit of speaking with POISE where P stands for Projection of voice, O reminds you to Open the mouth and articulate every sound, I reminds you to inhale, S stands for Smile and E reminds you to Exhale and speak with effortless effort."

In addition to this approach, which I believe was of significant benefit, I would also program my mind before going to bed by reminding myself of all the things I had done well that day and looked forward to doing even better the next day.

**I practiced success.** Too often in the past I had tried to master my speech by simply taking a positive attitude, summoning courage and plowing ahead. Too often I had failed. I either was dysfluent, or it felt I was skating on thin ice and my fluency might fall apart at any moment. However after reading Leonard Morehouse's *Theory of Maximum Performance*, I realized I needed to link successful behavior with a feeling of ease and enjoyment and an expectation of further success.

The central idea in Morehouse's book was the value of practicing in a winning environment. In other words it is not enough to practice the successful behavior, it is also important to practice a winning attitude and

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a winning feeling.

To highlight this point Morehouse quoted a study in which two groups — one comprised of successful sportsmen and the other, a group drawn from the general population, were introduced to golf. Researchers analyzed the various strategies employed by individuals in each group as they went about developing their golf game.

It turned out that individuals in the general group were quick to pick up the most difficult club, such as the one wood (or driver), and try to blast the ball as far as possible. In contrast, the sportsmen group chose to build on successful experiences. Their approach was to begin with one of the easiest clubs, a 9-iron, and practice relatively easy chip shots before moving on to more difficult clubs. The last club they attempted to use was the driver! The general group had limited success and often gave up in frustration while the sportsmen group used each successive success to build self-confidence and enjoyed proceeding to each new level of challenge.

I applied this strategy in learning to talk on the telephone. I was so terrified of the telephone that I had to make my “success steps” very small in order to create situations where I had a reasonable expectation of doing well. My steps in order were:

- Learning to relax in my favorite chair (in a quiet corner of my bedroom)
- Learning to relax in my favorite chair while looking at my telephone
- Learning to relax in my favorite chair while hearing the telephone ring
- Learning to relax in my favorite chair while holding the telephone to my ear
- Learning to relax while watching myself in a mirror hold the telephone
- Learning to relax while speaking with the telephone and watching myself in the mirror.
- Learning to relax while ringing and speaking to a friend on the telephone
- Learning to relax while making calls to strangers. (hotel and airline staff)
- Learning to relax while talking on telephones other than the one in my bedroom! (It seems funny but for a while I could only be fluent on that one bedroom telephone.)
- Learning to relax while using the telephone in front of other people

After success with each step I would move on to the next with a feeling of anticipation and excitement. But I realized from my studies in psychology that I needed to reinforce the success. Simply doing it once was not enough. I found it necessary to practice each step two to three times per day

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and make at least 10 calls per day. I also realized from my psychology studies that I had to be constant in my practice. The longer I left between practice sessions, the more likely I was to return to the old fears.

I have also used this strategy to develop my speaking ability and am pleased to report I have now reached division level in Toastmaster public speaking competitions. My steps here involved:

- Learning to speak well when alone (reading aloud and rehearsing my speech)
- Learning to speak well at my stuttering support group meetings
- Learning to speak well at general meetings using a delayed auditory feedback device
- Learning to speak well at Toastmasters

My next step is to speak well in public at any time.

**I learned to stay on track.** It really helps to join a support group. It is well accepted that support groups have a therapeutic value of their own. I have found many benefits. They link us to people with a common interest which helps keep us on track with our plans for change. This link also provides an opportunity to develop socially. (This is important for people who stutter who need to make up for lost time spent avoiding social situations.)

But more than this, it is important to engage others in discussion because this helps us consolidate our ideas, develop our self-identity and check emotional reality. (People who stutter who have not engaged in discussions have missed an important opportunity for development.) The value of this to our psyche cannot be underestimated.

Another value of a support group is that it provides an opportunity to help others. I believe this to be a prime human need. It provides you with food for the soul. It also helps you become more centered and leads to a greater feeling of overall relaxation and improved speaking and communicating.

**I changed my self-image as a speaker.** My advice: keep a journal. Record your successes. Write down each time you speak well. (Describe who, when and where.) I found reviewing the ever-expanding list of successful speaking situations to be extremely powerful in changing my self-image as a speaker. Too often, I think that people who stutter have overemphasized their limitations as communicators. To my mind, it is important that this false image be corrected by receiving validation as a speaker wherever possible. The journal helped me do this.

**I developed a sense of humor and a realistic perspective.** Whatever we may feel, stuttering is not the worst thing that anyone has ever experienced in the history of mankind. I find I communicate best when I allow myself a few dysfluencies and let go of the need to produce perfect

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speech. When and if dysfluencies occur, I take it as feedback to slow down and breathe more. I no longer feel as embarrassed, ashamed or as tense as I once did. With this approach, I feel certain I am not only decreasing stuttered speech but I am also decreasing, if not eliminating, stuttered feelings which after all are the real cause of the pain of stuttering.

### *A FEW CLOSING THOUGHTS*

My perspective has drawn inspiration from the following statements:

- Life is a journey not a destination.
- The journey of a 1000 miles starts with a single step.
- Obstacles are only opportunities in disguise.
- The smallest action is better than the noblest intent.

The above points relate to specific actions that can be taken to improve speech and communication. But I also think it is important to have a clear philosophy of life in order to build a foundation from which your actions can be taken. I have drawn a feeling of inner peace (which I believe provides me with general relaxation and better speech and communication) from the philosophy outlined in the verses written by Max Ehrmann in 1927. Known as the *Desiderata*, it reads:

*Go placidly amid the noise and haste,  
and remember what peace there may be in silence.  
As far as possible without surrender be on good terms with all persons.  
Speak your truth quietly and clearly; and listen to others,  
even the dull and the ignorant; they too have their story.  
Avoid loud and aggressive persons, they are the vexations of the spirit.  
If you compare yourself to others you may become vain or bitter,  
for always there will be greater and lesser persons than yourself.  
Enjoy your achievements as well as your plans.  
Keep interested in your own career, however humble,  
it is a real possession in the changing fortunes of time.  
Exercise caution in your business affairs,  
for the world is full of trickery.  
But let this not blind you to what virtue there is,  
many persons strive for high ideals, and everywhere  
life is full of heroism.  
Be yourself.  
Especially do not feign affection. Neither be cynical about love,  
for in the face of all aridity and disenchantment  
it is as perennial as the grass.  
Take kindly the counsel of the years,*

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*gracefully surrendering the things of youth.  
Nurture strength of spirit to shield you in sudden misfortune.  
But do not distress yourself with imaginings.  
Many fears are borne of fatigue and loneliness.  
Beyond a wholesome discipline, be gentle with yourself.  
You are a child of the universe  
no less than the trees and the stars;  
you have the right to be here.  
And whether or not it is clear to you,  
no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should.  
Therefore be at peace with God, whatever you conceive Him to be.  
And whatever your labors and aspirations,  
in the noisy confusion of life  
keep peace with your soul.  
With all its sham, drudgery and broken dreams,  
it is still a beautiful world. Be careful.  
Strive to be happy.*

I have received ideas, inspiration and encouragement from many sources. To my friends and fellow travelers who have helped my efforts, I say "thank you." Too often, as people who stutter, we are unnecessarily hard on ourselves and on each other. I have really valued the support I have received, and I hope this paper serves as a guide for others making the same journey.

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## DEFINING STUTTERING FROM THE SPEAKER'S VIEWPOINT

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by Mark Irwin, D.D.S

*Joseph Sheehan, clinical psychologist and PWS who died in 1983, wrote a last statement on his death bed which read..."Defining stuttering as a fluency problem ...ignores the person: it ignores his feelings about himself, it ignores the significance of stuttering in his life; it ignores ...the 'double boiler' function of maintenance of the handicap in many cases; it ignores the principle that just because an individual stutters, that is necessarily the chief problem with which a clinician need be concerned." Perkins (90, p. 379).*

*Until now, we have not had a diagnostic term that recognizes the multidimensionality of chronic stuttering. Consequently, a simple diagnosis of "stuttering" often leads clinicians to overlook critical emotional and psychological issues associated with stuttering that need to be addressed.*

*This article remedies this by introducing a new clinical term to help clinicians more effectively diagnose and address a stuttering/blocking problem.*

**J**oe Sheehan died two years before the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM 111-R) broadened the definition of Social Anxiety to include fear and distress in most situations. (Berman and Schneier, 2004). Subsequently Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD), particularly when combined with other diagnoses, has come to be recognized as a common cause for psychiatric ill health and for major disruption of role functioning. By linking stuttering with Social Anxiety Disorder this paper seeks to provide a solution for Sheehan's concerns and to make sense of what experienced clinician William Perkins, meant when he said: *"In my experience those who have complained most bitterly and seemed most fearful of stuttering have been clients whom I have rarely, if ever, heard stutter. To say they do not stutter is to deny they consider themselves stutterers."* Perkins (90, p375).

In brief this paper hopes to provide definitions and labels that enable stuttering to be defined from the speaker's viewpoint. It is hoped this

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will allow a differential diagnosis of stuttering as well as more accurate and effective public awareness messages.

## THE CURRENT SITUATION

When stuttering is discussed it is variously referred to as the behaviour of dysfluent speech, or as a syndrome including both dysfluent speech and the reactions to it. This creates a problem. *How should severity of stuttering be measured — by frequency of behaviour or by the degree of reaction to it?*

And there are associated questions. Should stuttering severity be measured by the percentage of stuttered syllables only, or should it also include word substitution? How should the syndrome be described when it is understood that increased frequency of stuttering (behaviour) is not directly related to severity of internal reactions (psychopathology)? Also given the common coexistence of psychopathology for people who stutter (figures for SAD in adults who stutter range from 50% (Kraaimaat et al, 2002) to 75% (Stein et al, 1996)), should new terminology be developed to bring awareness to this fact?

Stuttering with SAD is a different experience than stuttering without it. It could be said that it is the SAD that accentuates the situational specificity of stuttering as well as resulting in feelings of panic and loss of control. Also it is the SAD that is responsible for serious role impairment and compromise to quality of life. *But have we the words/terms/labels to describe this and provide answers to the questions posed above?*

Consider the following scene. 3 men chat in a bar. Tom's stutter is more obvious.

TOM: *I ssstutter. When I go out it ttttakes me lllonger to order a bbbeer.*

DICK: *I ssstutter. I order a scotch because I can't say bbeer.*

HARRY: *I ssstutter. I'm extremely embarrassed and frustrated by it. I rarely go out. I avoid relationships.*

Are these three people suffering the same disorder? Who has the severe stutter? How should they be differentiated? Would they benefit from the same therapy?

First let's consider: What is stuttering? Is it....

- a) Dysfluent speech the listener hears? (Tom)
  - b) Dysfluent speech the listener hears and the speaker hides? (Dick)
  - c) Dysfluent speech and its effects on quality of life? (Harry)
  - d) All of above
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## THE CURRENT PROBLEM

A review of literature and websites would suggest the answer to “What is stuttering?” is d) all of above. The fact that stuttering can be any of the three options creates an obvious problem in communication about stuttering. More specifically it creates a problem with discussion and measurement of stuttering frequency and severity. Currently stuttering and its psychosocial impact are all described by the same word — stuttering. Stuttering is the name of both the syndrome and the symptom. This is a problem since as seen by the above example stuttering can have a psychosocial impact that is not related to the frequency of dysfluencies or the severity of associated struggle behaviour.

The definition problem is recognized by the American Speech Hearing Association (ASHA). In their current guidelines they give 4 definitions of stuttering noting “it would be a serious mistake to select any one of the stuttering definitions fÜd assume it would apply equally well for teaching, clinical, research, consumer affairs and third party reimbursement purposes.” Furthermore they note “the fluency area is plagued with inconsistent, confusing terminology”. ASHA Guidelines (99, p29).

## A SOLUTION

A solution is possible if language is developed to enable a clear description for the separate experiences of Tom, Dick and Harry. How to do this? Two steps are necessary.

1. Clarify the use of the term covert stuttering (specifically to distinguish escape behaviour from avoidance behaviour, and distinguish both from psychosocial impact.)
2. Introduce new term Stuttered Speech Syndrome (to link stuttering dysfluency with commonly associated psychopathology).

**Clarification of "Covert Stuttering".** Covert is a term with many meanings in stuttering. In the literature it is used to refer to

- a) speech deliberately hidden by the speaker, (word omission and substitution)
- b) situation avoidance by the speaker,
- c) what is unobservable about the speaker (attitudes and emotions)
- d) what is unknown or not widely appreciated about stuttering.

The multiple meanings create confusion and cause problems with accurate communication. One solution is to only regard covert stuttering as the speech deliberately hidden by the speaker (otherwise described as the speech event of *escape* behaviour after sentence formulation). The speaker (in this case Dick) omits, substitutes or circumlocutes as a way to hide what

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he recognizes would otherwise be an overt stutter. This is distinct from situation *avoidance* behaviour (as demonstrated by Harry). It is necessary to make this distinction if we are to restrict our definition and measurement of stuttering to dysfluent speech events as experienced by the speaker. (Note: Escape and Avoidance are established psychological terms.)

In any case the strict definition of the word covert is secretive or *deliberately* hidden as opposed to the simple meaning of hidden. Describing emotional/attitudinal responses as covert introduces potential inaccuracy. They may be covert if they are secretive or deliberately hidden, but they cannot be regarded as covert simply because they are not on view or their existence is not often appreciated.

This has clinical implications. Irrespective of presence of psychopathology a person with minor *overt* dysfluency may be experiencing frequent *covert* dysfluency. With this new terminology attention can be drawn to the fact that children who stutter should not necessarily be denied therapy simply because they have minor *overt* dysfluency. They may well have frequent *covert* dysfluency.

### *STUTTERED SPEECH SYNDROME*

The negative emotional, behavioural and attitudinal reactions (also known as affective, behavioural and cognitive reactions) to stuttering are not always present, or certainly not always significant enough to warrant a diagnosis of psychopathology. Clearly they don't affect Tom but are extremely significant in Harry's life. Of course Tom has some frustration but there is no significant life impact.

One way to clarify and describe this difference in life impact is to relate stuttering to Social Anxiety Disorder (also known as Social Phobia) by introducing a new term – Stuttered Speech Syndrome.

Social Anxiety Disorder is a separate disability that can either be specific to certain social situations or generalized to most. The vast majority of individuals with SAD report their career, academic and general functioning has been seriously impaired by their fears. 70-80% of sufferers meet criteria for additional diagnoses and in most cases SAD predates the co-morbid condition. Also SAD most commonly begins in early childhood. (These facts make for speculation on the cause of stuttering that is best left to future research and discussed in a later online conference! Which came first, the anxiety disorder or the stuttering? Interestingly Selective Mutism is a social anxiety disorder in which anxiety symptoms make speech impossible. Clearly anxiety symptoms impact on speech production.). Since one of the negative behavioural effects of social embarrassment about stuttering is increased dysfluency and

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more social embarrassment, then a separation of stuttering from social anxiety disorder is difficult. Instead it is necessary to create a new term, say Stuttered Speech Syndrome, which refers to symptoms experienced by those with the twin disabilities of dysfluent speech and social anxiety disorder. That is two people may stutter but only one has Stuttered Speech Syndrome (stuttering plus social anxiety disorder.)

Of course some may argue that SAD could be associated with other disorders in which symptoms are subject to social display e.g., shaking in Parkinson's disease, and that therefore there is no need to make a separate case of the link between SAD and stuttering. But the counterargument is that SAD does not cause more Parkinsons disease whereas it does cause more stuttering.. Secondly the link is so common (50 —75%) that language is made more efficient by having one term for both conditions.

A linking term like Stuttered Speech Syndrome brings understanding to stuttering in the same way that Anorexia Nervosa brings understanding to low body weight. To explain this point further, "low body weight" means one thing, "distorted body image" means another. Anorexia Nervosa refers to the coexistence of both conditions.

The existence of Stuttered Speech Syndrome has clear implications for treatment. It has previously been recognized that people with phobias like Social Anxiety Disorder are unable to think clearly. Lorberbaum et al (2004) reported phobics react more with automatic emotion and less with reasoning. With too much anxiety, phobics may be unable to think clearly enough to follow rational advice. Simply providing speech technique instruction to a person who stutters with coexisting SAD is to give advice this person is incapable of using under anxiety provoking conditions. These people are functioning more on conditioned emotional responses and are therefore unable to act on advice no matter how logical. It has been recognised that the presence of Social Anxiety Disorder (or any other mental health diagnosis) will result in the sufferer relapsing from a speech restructuring treatment. (Iverach et al, 2009). Another point is strategies given as part of a speech restructuring treatment may function as safety behaviours maintaining if not exacerbating the SAD, and interfering with standard cognitive behavioural therapy techniques by preserving threat belief. (Lovibond et al, 2009).

The other issue is that SAD (also known as social phobia) can be overcome even if it is difficult to remove all stuttering behaviour. Stein, Baird, and Walker (1996) pointed out that SAD should not be overlooked as a potentially remedial source of distress and disability for people who stutter.

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## **DIAGNOSIS OF STUTTERED SPEECH SYNDROME**

Stuttered Speech Syndrome would be diagnosed when both disabilities of stuttering and Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD) coexist. While overt stuttering is obvious to the listener and both overt and covert stuttering are obvious to the speaker, the coexistence of SAD can be confirmed by using a self-report measure such as the Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale questionnaire (LSAS). The LSAS is a standard diagnostic instrument in the psychiatric world that has been shown to be sensitive to the interventions of pharmacology and cognitive behavioural therapy (Fresco et al., 2001).

## **BACK TO THE BAR**

By clarifying the old term covert stuttering and introducing the new term Stuttered Speech Syndrome, it is now possible to provide a succinct differential diagnosis for Tom, Dick and Harry.

*TOM: My speech pathologist has diagnosed I have an overt stutter with no covert stuttering or associated psychopathology. Retraining of speech muscles, breathing instruction and rate control are proposed.*

*DICK: My speech pathologist screened for Social Anxiety Disorder. That was not present but she has drawn attention to my covert stutter. I understand I need to overcome my fear and embarrassment of overt stuttering or else it may build to the psychopathology of Social Anxiety Disorder. If this happens I will be diagnosed with Stuttered Speech Syndrome.*

*HARRY: My speech pathologist screened for Social Anxiety Disorder and has diagnosed severe Stuttered Speech Syndrome. I have been told I need to do something about about my SAD before I can expect any speech restructuring treatment for my stuttering to be effective. Cognitive behavioural therapy and participation in self-help groups are two of the treatment modalities that have been suggested. Referrals have been arranged.*

In a future fantasy world all might live happily ever after. Tom continued to stutter because old habits die hard and, because stuttering had minimal impact in his life, he lacked motivation to change. Dick worked hard on his attitudes, perceptions, beliefs, and emotions and overcame his co-

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vert stuttering. While he occasionally overtly stutters he is able to order the beer he wants. Harry received cognitive behavioural therapy and is now actively socializing and enjoying life. He is stuttering more because he is speaking more and saying the first word not its substitute. His stuttering is more frequent but it is no longer associated with feelings of panic and loss of control. His Stuttered Speech Syndrome has been cured.

## CONCLUSION

Since not everyone who stutters suffers social phobia or uses the covert strategy of word omission, substitution and circumlocution, then distinctions are needed in stuttering terminology. Leaving aside questions of cause and neurological, genetic and biochemical events, it can be argued the definitions that make most sense are:

**Stutter** (*synonymous with stammer*) — *to produce dysfluent speech characterized in overt form by repetitions, prolongations and blocks, or in covert form by avoidance, substitution and circumlocution.*

**Overt Stuttering** is repetitions, prolongations and blocks.

**Covert Stuttering** is word omission, substitution and circumlocution aimed at hiding, what the speaker recognizes would be, an overt stutter.

For those who would like a more academic definition then, the following is most accurate:

**Stuttering**—*temporary inability, either overtly or covertly, to move forward fluently with linguistically formulated speech.* Perkins (84, p. 431).

The link of stuttering to the post 1985 definition of social phobia, is best made by creating a new term:

**Stuttered Speech Syndrome** - *symptoms resulting from coexistence of stuttering and social anxiety disorder (social phobia).* Specifically these symptoms are behaviours of stuttering with feelings of panic and loss of control, situation avoidance, attitudes of low self-confidence and low self-esteem, and emotions of frustration and anxiety.

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## A PROCESS OF RECOVERY

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by Walt Manning, Ph.D.

In 1996 I was asked to take part in a panel of “recovered stutterers” at the national meeting of my professional association, the annual convention of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association to be held in Seattle. On many levels, it was a major milepost in a long journey toward fluency. Earlier in my life I could not have imagined, even in my more extraordinary dreams, that I would someday be able to speak to an audience of several hundred people with a reasonable level of fluency. Even more amazing, I was now able to look forward to the experience.

Many years before I had attended a similar presentation at my annual convention. I sat in the back row of a large room and marveled at the ability of these people who had achieved fluency. Many of them were well known people in the field. I remember being envious of the fluency that qualified them to be part of such a panel. I believe that I was also impressed with the professional reputations they had earned. I never could have predicted that I would be one of the people standing in their place some twenty years later. As I was about to be introduced that morning in Seattle I wondered how it was that I found myself at that podium looking forward to my participation. I will try to explain how I think it happened.

Although my explanation will have threads that can be found in similar narratives, I remember that one of my professors once told me that there are many paths up the mountain of fluency. In general I believe that the timing of therapeutic events is probably as important as anything: the timing of one’s readiness for change and the timing and good fortune necessary for connecting with the right clinician. You also need to understand the amount of time that is required for practicing behavioral techniques to the extent that they are overlearned and permit performance amongst the stresses of the real world. It’s also important to realize that it will take time for affective and cognitive adjustments to catch up with behavioral changes.

If I could remember when I began to stutter it might help me to understand the story. It would be wonderful to have audio tapes or sound movies to analyze for signs of stuttering. Unfortunately the only thing available in the 1950s were soundless movies that captured my siblings and I squinting into the stadium-sized lights that were attached to the film cameras of the time. Although I can’t remember specific experiences, I’m

certain that I was stuttering and probably avoiding to some extent by late elementary school. By the time I reached junior high my status as a person who stuttered was undeniable. Many of my choices from that point on were dictated by the reality as well as the possibility of stuttering. There were many fearful and embarrassing speaking situations, many of them associated with classroom requirements for verbal responses, especially presentations. Although I was reasonably successful and really quite happy throughout high school and college, I frequently felt as though I was on the edge of a precipice as I cautiously placed my words so as not to fall off the ledge of fluency into the abyss of stuttering.

Although I was able to survive as a stutterer, I was frequently frustrated and sometimes angered by my inability to discover what I sensed was a greater potential. I was often cautious when speaking and would not allow myself to say something without first scanning ahead and looking for feared words. Years later I was to realize that I really did have many things to say but had refused to try. Because of my fear of stuttering, I refused to even consider taking part in some conversations or activities such as presentations or school plays. Perhaps even more basic, I began to realize that I had ideas that I didn't even know about. It was like writing something and not knowing what you think until you put it on the screen. And then those ideas lead to new thoughts that you would not have otherwise had. Because I expended so much effort running from my stuttering by avoiding situations and substituting words, I often did not allow myself to know precisely what I truly thought, and my thoughts never had a chance to grow.

On a few occasions during junior and senior high school I ventured into therapy. In those days speech-language pathologists were not available in many of the schools. During eighth grade I attended therapy at a local hospital. The clinicians were well-meaning and obviously knew something about stuttering. However, I don't believe that they knew much about the experience of stuttering or what it was like to be someone who stuttered. If they did, they were never able to convey that insight, that empathy to me. They gave me assignments, none of which I can remember. I don't think I was asked to voluntarily stutter, something I'm certain that I would have rebelled against. I recall that I was asked to do mildly assertive things like talk to people and make telephone calls. I do remember that, whatever it was they asked me to do, I didn't practice it any more than I practiced my piano in between my scheduled piano lessons. Not much changed in my speech, and after a few months I ceased attending. Anyway, it was time to go on to college.

In spite of the advice from my high school guidance counselor that "I probably wasn't college material," I decided to give it a try at a school located in my hometown in Pennsylvania. Lycoming College was, and still is, a

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“small Christian college.” It’s not that the students are all that tiny, it’s just that it did, and still does, enroll relatively few students (about 1100) of all religions and backgrounds. Although I officially majored in sociology, I felt like my major focus was being a member of the swimming team. I mention this now because my experiences on the swimming team were to have a real impact on my life in general and in my efforts to achieve fluency. Up to that time I had never swum in competition, but by my sophomore year I found that I had some ability, and I began to win some events. My experiences in the pool and with my teammates became a major part of my identity during my college years. During my junior and senior year I began breaking some school records and was elected captain of the team.

I completed college and had a degree but knew that my stuttering would be a major roadblock in finding a job. I tried to enroll in the officer candidate program of the Marines but was rejected about the time I reached the second sentence of the “Grandfather Passage” [a test of reading skills] and blocked (probably on “frock coat”). Actually, trying to become a Marine officer probably wasn’t such a bright idea since this was 1964 and some of my buddies, who were more successful than I was in being selected for OCS, never came home from Viet Nam. So what did I decide to do? I tried to get into the Air Force officer candidate school. (Maybe my high school guidance counselor was right after all.) This time I made it to about the sixth line of “Arthur the Young Rat” before they asked me to leave. I was devastated not so much because I never did find out what happened to young Arthur — but because I had no idea what I might do now. Being drafted, of course, was a distinct possibility and in a few weeks I found myself standing in my underwear having my hearing (among other things) examined by people who didn’t seem to be all that friendly. I figured I would be selected and, after a few more months of temporary work at warehouse where I had been loading boxcars with artificial Christmas trees, I would be sent off to boot camp. Alas, even the Selective Service rejected me when they identified my reasonably profound high frequency hearing loss. It seemed that no one wanted me.

### *A READINESS FOR CHANGE*

I remember the evening that I decided to enroll in treatment. I went for a walk in the neighborhood, sat down on a curb, and decided that it was the time to ask for help. I knew that my life would be a series of dead ends, or at least narrow pathways, if I wasn’t able to freely express myself. I believe it was the first time in my life that I had fully accepted the fact that I stuttered. It was certainly the first time that I was really ready to do something about it. I had no idea what I was going to do with my life in the

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long term, but for now, I needed to do something about my speech. I was ready to do whatever was necessary. I didn't care how long it would take or what it would cost.

The next day I drove to the local hospital where I had received my treatment while in the eighth grade. Some of the same people were still there including the clinic director. Also there that day was a professor named Asa Berlin who was visiting from Penn State University. He told me about a young professor who had just arrived at the University clinic. Eugene Cooper was a new assistant professor who directed an intensive residential program called the Adult Therapy Program for people like me who stuttered. The intersection of our lives would be one of the key events of my life. I didn't know it at the time, but Gene would become my professional mentor.

I obtained some funding from the Rehabilitation Services Administration and used virtually all of my meager savings. I attended the program at Penn State for two successive semesters and did pretty well. Eugene and the clinicians in the program were all on the same page about the nature and direction of treatment. I learned what stuttering was and what it was not. The experience of stuttering became less of a mystery. I began to become desensitized about stuttering and somewhat more assertive with my speech. Most importantly, treatment helped me to understand that I had a choice; I didn't have to be helpless when I stuttered. I began to see that there were some cause-and-effect relationships about my stuttering and my response to the experience. I realized that if I avoided certain words they became more powerful. On the other hand, if I chose not to avoid the words, even if I stuttered on them, the words became less fearful. I began to see that I could sometimes hang in there and resist forces such as listener reactions and time pressure. I made a small beginning in appreciating the humorous aspects of my speech and my situation.

After completing the program I returned home for the summer to find temporary work. It's difficult to go home again to the sites of many past fluency failures. I remember avoiding some places, people, words, and sounds. I was far from free. I also remember feeling pressure to maintain my fluency when speaking with people who knew that I had attended the treatment program. My experiences in therapy had made me aware of a field that I didn't know existed, and in the fall of that year I traveled back to Penn State to begin the two-year master's program in speech pathology.

During my subsequent schooling at Penn State, working for two years as a speech pathologist in the public schools just outside Philadelphia, and with more schooling at Michigan State University, my speech remained reasonably fluent. Still, I continued to have many fears related to stuttering. I know that the cognitive and attitude changes necessary for success had not caught up to my ability to use behavioral techniques to achieve fluency. It

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would be another fifteen years before I achieved the confidence in my techniques and my ability to use them that would result in a high level of nearly spontaneous fluency — a point where I would no longer have to closely monitor my speech production or feel handicapped by my stuttering.

### *KEY FACTORS*

As I think back over several decades of change from my current perspective, I believe that I can identify some of the key factors that facilitated my progress toward greater fluency. I know that there was no single step or event. It is a process of change that is still underway. I do know that it was extremely important that I was desperately ready for change. I knew that my life — whatever it was going to be — would not be all that it could be if I didn't face my problem. My rejections because of my stuttering, both big and small, had taught me that. I was able to find good help from caring people when I was ready for it. They had experience and were clearly unafraid of stuttering. They had a map and a sense of direction through what, to me at least, was hostile territory. They were willing to push and sometimes drag me along the right path. I think that it was especially important they were willing to walk the path with me, modeling behavior and ways of thinking that I needed to try on and experience.

I believe that the experiences I had as a swimmer in college taught me more than I realized at the time. I saw how important it was to practice long hours, not only to learn technique but to make the technique part of you and to have great confidence in your ability. I learned that, with persistence, you would be able to improve and perform in a way that seemed impossible during the early stages of learning. You could go faster than you ever imagined and break records you didn't know were attainable. I believe those lessons transferred to my experiences with my speech. I found that I could have success in spite of the fear. I found that if I decided to push the envelope of my experience it was possible to achieve little victories and slowly move in the direction I wanted to go. I found that if I was willing to be persistent and wanted success badly enough, it would eventually happen. So I kept making telephone calls, lecturing, and giving presentations. I wasn't especially good at it for a long time. But that was what I wanted to do and eventually I got better at it.

Lastly, I believe that another important factor was the support I received. My clinicians believed in me, and I think I always had support in many forms from my family and friends. Later on I had support from people in a profession that, for the most part, is comprised of caring and understanding professionals. Unfortunately I was not a member of a formal

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support group during the years of significant change, but I have seen the power of such membership, and it can be invaluable.

For the last 20 years or so I have felt absolutely no handicap associated with my speech. On the other hand, I'm perfectly comfortable to be identified as a person who stutters. It's just that I don't do it very often — maybe two or three times a month. When I do stutter, I don't avoid, I'm not likely to panic, and I have the confidence that I can stay in the moment and smooth out the fluency break. Perhaps the most important thing is that the possibility of stuttering never enters into my decision making about living. Stuttering is no longer a factor when I choose whether or not to talk to people, use a telephone, order in a restaurant, ask a question, or accept a speaking engagement.

For a few years I felt the urge to apologize for my fluency when speaking to stuttering support groups, but I no longer do that. I'm proud of my fluent speech, and I believe that, after all the years of effort, I have earned the right to be happy about my speech. I also enjoy the opportunity to present my thoughts to professionals at workshops throughout the country. I have discovered that the experience of interacting and drawing energy from an audience is exhilarating. I nearly always learn something from a public speaking experience, and I am thankful that I am able to be an active colleague with people I admire.

I am also happy that I am able to connect with people who would otherwise be strangers in a shop, on a plane, or on the road. I am thankful that I have been able to take my thoughts and turn them into fluent words during good times and bad. I have been able to give eulogies in honor of dear friends, colleagues, and parents. I would rather not have to do that sort of thing, but I am honored and very proud to do it well.

Finally, it's important to explain that I am comfortable with my fluency. It takes a while for that to happen and it requires some substantial shifting in the way you define yourself. I would never want to give the impression that the path has been an easy one and without fear and failures. But, all things considered, it has been a grand adventure. Rather than my demon, I have come to regard my stuttering as a gift, something that has taken me to exciting places, provided me with opportunities for growth, and allowed me to meet wonderful people that I would never have met otherwise. Over the years I've heard other people who stutter say the same thing, and I know they mean it.

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## **FREEDOM OF SPEECH: HOW I OVERCAME STUTTERING**

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**by Tim Mackesey, CCC-SLP**

### *BOCA RATON*

It's the second week of my sophomore year in a college accounting class in Boca Raton, Florida, and I'm about to relive my worst nightmare. My professor has just announced that we will go down the rows of seats one after another taking turns reading the homework questions and giving our answer. I was in total panic. All my past memories of and embarrassment for reading aloud in class, from childhood to now, were all a cumulative horror.

The worst fear of my life was in front of me right now. I had to read. I could not leave the room. For many years I used to leave the room saying I had to go to the bathroom. As a result of fear, I would stutter while asking to flee. Here I was feeling like a naked, armorless knight cornered by a fire-breathing dragon.

I began to stutter on nearly every word. I was suffocating as my larynx tightened, and I created massive speech blocks. I noticed some of my classmates turned with an astonished look, as they had never heard me speak. They were probably very surprised. I had stayed silent in the class before that moment.

I left the class that day feeling defeated. I went to the admissions office and dropped the class. I lost a percentage of my tuition, but I gained leverage on myself to finally begin changing. That was it. I could not go on like this anymore.

Later that day I was in my room alone. I was reading aloud the very same text I had read earlier in class. I read totally fluently and totally at ease. I thought I sounded like a news correspondent, or actor. My voice was rich, my chest was relaxed, my tongue moved from sound to sound and syllable to syllable with ease and fluency. Was I hallucinating or was I really capable of speaking this way? I was in a different identity at the moment. This "alone identity" did not expect or know how to stutter. Then I got the idea to record myself. I went to push the record button, started reading it, and immediately started stuttering. I turned off the machine in disgust.

I can reflect back and make an association to telephone answering machines at the time. You see, for about a decade I had hung up instead of

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leaving messages on answering machines. Caller ID was not born yet. At the time, all I knew was that I was doing something to sabotage my speech. I believed that because I could speak with total ease in fluency when alone, that I was created perfectly by God. At that moment the pain was so great that I finally had leverage. I would reach my goal of effortless, block-free speech if it killed me.

*“THE JOURNEY BEGINS WITHIN AND IT ENDS WITHIN.” — SUFI*

At that time in my life, age 19, I lived with what Joseph Sheehan called the “giant in chains complex.” Like the giant in *Gulliver’s Travels* pinned to the ground by the tiny Lilliputians, I felt shackled by my stuttering. I blamed everything on my stuttering. For instance, the manager at the exclusive restaurant I was working had offered me a promotion from busboy to waiter on several occasions. I made up illogical excuses and deferred promotions each time. I would’ve gone from \$50 a night in tips to about \$200. Again, pain was applied to my stutter. I wasn’t dating much because I wouldn’t call any of the women I met. Not calling women was self-induced torture.

I have learned that when people finally take action they are either motivated by pain or pleasure; the pain of continuing to struggle as they are or the perceived pleasure of overcoming their obstacle. Like the proverbial mule that starves between two haystacks, I had been immobilized by indecision. I had refused speech therapy for many years. I was caught in the middle, suffering but not taking action. Ironically, it was in Boca, meaning “mouth” in Spanish, where I finally developed enough pain that I took action. Raton means “rat” in Spanish. Up until then, I felt I had a rodent living in my brain and in my mouth.

*“TIMMY, YOU STUTTER!”*

Until second grade I had no idea there was anything different about my speech. I was a little blond hair, blue-eyed boy running through life. One day in elementary school we were planting seeds into little cups with dirt in them. Apparently I stuttered. My teacher took me by the wrist, led me into the hallway, closed the door, and in the privacy of the hallway looked down at me and said: “Timmy you stutter!” She had a look of concern and urgency on her face. I had never heard the word stutter before, but I knew it had to be bad based on her facial expressions and the inherent need to take me into the hallway to deliver the news.

I became her project. She began pushing me to talk more than the other children did. She assigned me the lead in a play called *The Lincoln Pennies*.

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I recall standing on the stage one day in our small auditorium and stuttering in front of all the parents of the children—including my mother. My teacher had good intentions. She wanted to help me. She, and anyone else I used to blame for my feelings about stuttering, have been completely forgiven — a crucial step towards healing. It was not her fault that I stuttered. There is a family history of stuttering on my paternal side. Even though my family does not recall any stuttering prior to that, maybe I had some age appropriate disfluency. Either way, it is of no benefit to look back.

Whatever this problem was that I had with my speech, it was apparently significant to others. I recall a very brief enrollment in speech therapy that was held in a utility closet at my elementary school. There was Tim, a mop, a bucket, some toys, and my speech teacher. I was discharged from speech therapy after a short while.

Earlier, in first grade, I loved being singled out for my accomplishments. Apparently my handwriting was good for my age. I was often asked to come to the front of the room and write on the chalkboard. Expressing myself brought me great pride. In third, fourth, and fifth grade I gradually began “acting out” more in classes. I chose to be a prankster and instigator as a form of expression. My stuttering remained about the same for the duration of elementary school.

I had several situations of blatant teasing and taunting in elementary school. One girl in particular was a frequent pain to me. After seeing how much she could anger me, she recruited some friends and choreographed a skit in which they put their hands on their hips, move from side to side and called me “stutter butt” in unison. One day I walked out of a class into the hallway and was greeted by them with their new dance routine. A number of people asked why I stuttered or imitated it. In hindsight, it is clear to me that my reaction to these experiences are the reasons why I started programming myself to prevent stuttering. Many years later I would learn Charles Van Riper’s famous quote: “Stuttering is everything we do trying not to stutter.”

## *MIDDLE SCHOOL*

The first day of homeroom in sixth grade we sat in a circle and introduced ourselves. Across from me sat what I thought was the most beautiful girl I had ever seen. After spying her at orientation that summer, I thought I hit the lottery to have her in my homeroom. We were told to say our name and what we did the previous summer. I had been trying to flirt with her using my eyes. As my turn approached, I became very anxious and anticipated stuttering. When I started to stutter, she looked down, and when she looked back up at me, she had an uncomfortable smile. She now

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knew my secret. I tried to pretend like it didn't happen. The number of events that involved stuttering—events that helped build my phobia around speaking—developed quickly in middle school. Reading out loud was my biggest nightmare until eighth grade. Oral presentations would soon be torturous, as well. The telephone became as painful as picking up a piece of hot charcoal.

Taking a principle or belief such as “I will protect myself from feeling embarrassment by avoiding speaking and using tricks”...and translating that into physical behaviors...is called *mind-to-muscle*, by cognitive psychologist L. Michael Hall. This physicalizing of my speaking fear manifested itself in such behaviors as eye contact aversion, word changing, avoiding, sitting low in my seat in class, hanging up instead of leaving phone messages, inserting “uh um” as filler words before stuttering, using character voices, speaking on expiratory reserve and raising the pitch of my voice, jerking my head down during blocks, and so on. Over time, these avoidance strategies evolved into automatic and unconscious habits. Every behavior had a positive intention at first but ultimately, did not serve me well at all!

By middle school I had begun associating fear with specific words. For instance, the name of our street was Yellowstone Drive. If people asked me what street I lived on, I could remember past experiences of stuttering on the word and would go into a panic. I remember calling for pizza delivery to our home and when they would ask the name of the street go into choking speech blocks. I would later name this mechanism inside the brain that can scan into the past and/or forward for feared words a Linguistic Search Engine (LSE).

I was back in speech therapy now. I was being helped by a lovely woman with good intentions. I was being told that if I said five words, took a new breath, and said five more words, I would stay smooth and fluent. One day before a planned oral presentation in class, I came to her with great concern. I shared my fear of stuttering. She said: “Don't worry. Go in there, say your five words, take a breath, and five more words each breath and you'll stay totally smooth.” I went to class that day, stood in front of the class, stuttered, and I was snickered at by several children. Speech therapy had lost credibility for me, and I convinced my parents to let me quit. They offered to take me to the local university clinic, but I refused. Little did I know that I would end up at that very clinic many years later to start exterminating the rats in my mouth and brain.

## *HIGH SCHOOL*

Speech-wise, high school was a nightmare. I taught myself a myriad of strategies to avoid stuttering. In the classroom, I sat low in my seat,

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attempting to hide from teachers. I faked sick on days when I was to give an oral presentation. I negotiated a “D” grade for not doing an oral report in one class. Would you believe the teacher let me and did not call my parents? I take full responsibility for my cowardly choice, and at the same time, wonder what would have happened if he had convinced me to face my dragon?

I asked some teachers to excuse me from reading aloud. I substituted words, and avoided words so frequently that when I got done saying something, I would often be asked “What did you say?” Then I would end up stuttering through what I had originally intended to say. A very inefficient and frustrating way to communicate.

I did my best to avoid making any phone calls for nearly a decade. I sabotaged dating. I would ask a girl to “go with me” but then never call her. Sending these mixed signals, such as being nice at school but never calling, made the relationships short-lived. Confiding that I stuttered and was uncomfortable calling may have taken care of the whole problem. But I assigned great shame to my stuttering. I began mind reading my listeners, creating toxic thoughts such as “What would her mother think if she heard me stutter?” Some of the names of these girls continued to be feared words later in life.

We belonged to a country club at the time. Golf was my escape. Being a member of the club, I was entitled to make a tee-time by simply picking up the phone. Instead, I would ride my bike about 10 miles, put my name on a waiting list in the pro shop, and wait up to two hours before playing with people I often did not know. I would see other kids my age organizing foursomes and playing together on a routine basis. This self-induced outcast role was very painful.

## *THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN*

Before going to Boca Raton I spent my freshman year at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. That year in the dormitory was a blur of drinking, stuttering, and learning that I did not know how to study. When drunk, I forgot about my stuttering and was more fluent—liquid fluency. My moving to Boca was intended to give me an opportunity to step away and reevaluate my life.

One of the first things I did upon returning to Madison in my third year of college was to go down to the speech and hearing clinic to inquire about speech therapy. The waiting list was more than a year. At the clinic I met Florence “Flo” Filley, the clinic supervisor. I felt that she could see into my soul— my stuttering soul, that is. I arranged a few private sessions with her before getting a phone call from the clinic.

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Half way through my evaluation at the clinic, the graduate student said “Tim, we are not really hearing a lot of stuttering.” I knew this was a nice way of saying that I was changing words and avoiding too much. I replied, “Give me something to read.” When I started reading, the mask was off, and the monster came out of my mouth.

I had two semesters of speech therapy with graduate students at the clinic under the supervision of Flo. I started learning that I had some choices: I did not have to stutter the way I was stuttering, and I did not have to avoid the way I was avoiding. I made every appointment and was thirsty for knowledge. My covert avoidance was far from over though.

I recall praying in a church on campus. Between classes I would go in alone and cry in the front pew. I had initiated an inner turmoil by finally confronting my dragon—stuttering. It was breathing flames and daring me to raise my sword.

On speech “field trips” to a local shopping mall, my assignment was to stutter on purpose with store employees. When I did it, I would walk away from those sessions with a euphoric tingling in my stomach, knowing I just did what I feared the most. In retrospect, that very area around my abdomen I would later learn was ground zero for my anticipatory anxiety that precedes stuttering.

I took a job as a taxi driver. This proved to be one of the most powerful experiences of my life. Here I had the challenge of speaking to strangers in my cab and talking into the radio. I had established a hierarchy of fearful scenarios in my cab. Some of the worst speech blocks I have ever had were heard in the dispatch office of the taxi company as well as other drivers and employees. I started to fear saying certain street names and common pick up points. After several severe blocks on “hound,” I changed the word Greyhound into Graydog. Thinking it was cute, other drivers and dispatch adopted this new term for Greyhound. If people were in the car to hear me, I stuttered even worse into the radio.

I learned that changing street names was a problem. Henry Street is a major artery through the campus. One day I was called to give my location. I gave the name of an adjoining street to avoid saying the dreaded Henry; a wicked block-inducing word. Another driver passed me on Henry and when he heard me give a different street name he reported me for attempting to steal fares. In hindsight, I did not know where the fare was going to, hence I had no advantage in lying and reporting that I was about a block away from my actual location. Nevertheless, I was being dishonest with myself.

One day I was faced with the moment of truth. I had picked up three attractive sorority girls on Henry Street. In their presence I was to call in and report that I was picking up a fare on Henry Street and where I was going as

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a final destination. In speech therapy I had been practicing the traditional strategies of easy onsets. Easy onsets are done when initiating a word beginning with a vowel using soft, prolonged voicing.

It was show time! I decided that I was going to say it. I did my best to calm my racing mind and my panicked chest enough to use an easy onset into Henry. Little did these girls know that I equated the upcoming feat with making a 4 ft. putt to win the U.S. Open golf tournament in front of several million television viewers.

I started the word by emitting air through my larynx and stretching the /h/ sound for a couple seconds. When Henry Street came out of my mouth without a stutter, I wanted to park the car and begin a Mardi Gras-sized street party. That moment changed my life.

I could not wait to tell the folks at my next speech therapy session. That moment saying Henry Street without a stutter put me on the road to change. It showed me that I could control the monster in my mouth. If I was the giant in chains, then I had just started to break some of the shackles. Flo gave me a copy of an article called "And the Stuttering Just Dies" that was written by a man named Jack Menear who had overcome stuttering. A belief was born: the belief that others have overcome stuttering. Stories like this are metaphors that drove my determination.

All the time I was in speech therapy on campus I was concealing it from all but a few people. When friends saw me coming out of the building, they might inquire what class I was taking in that building, a building they were unfamiliar with. I would lie and say that I was using the restroom in that building. At one point, I had asked my clinician if she would use a plain envelope when sending me progress reports instead of stationery with a clinic address. Fortunately, they refused.

Nearing graduation in the spring of 1987, the student clinicians asked me when I thought I would be done working to improve my speech. I replied: "This May." God is that funny now! Knowing of my plans for moving to Atlanta, they recommended I pursue speech therapy when I got there.

I wonder if the graduate students who helped me will ever read this. I hope they do. People with communication disorders worldwide can thank the professors and graduate clinicians who make speech therapy affordable to so many at university-based clinics.

## *CHECKING IN*

I moved to Atlanta in spring of 1987 with \$150. By day I was working as a laborer for Manpower—the temporary agency. I was earning about \$9 per hour carrying sheet rock. I was also accepted into a training program for

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insurance salesman that met in the evenings. The insurance training program required us to cold call prospects and develop a list of 500 contacts. I was hung up on chronically word substituting or silently blocking during those calls. It felt like too big a challenge, and I dropped out of the program.

But I kept pushing. I took a job at the front desk of a major convention hotel in downtown Atlanta. I had to check in customers, answer the phone, and call guests in their room. I had to speak to supervisors, go to training meetings and speak, and take on other challenges. I was definitely facing the dragon; in fact, I'd call it total immersion.

Once again I developed my personal list of feared situations. Answering the assistant manager's private line was one of them. We were ordered to answer it within the first two rings and say: "Assistant manager's line, this is Tim speaking. May I help you?" After a few massive blocks on the words "assistant" and "manager" I began avoiding. I would act busy and let others answer the phone, but there were some situations, for example when the assistant manager was standing right there, when I would have to answer. I would turn away so he or she would not hear me and create a block. Several times, guests who were already irate about something and calling to complain would remark by saying: "Easy for you to say," or scoff at me in their moment of no patience.

When I interviewed for a management training position at the hotel, my supervisor asked if I could handle it with my stuttering. After blushing, I said yes. You see, I only spoken of my stuttering problem with a select few people, yet everyone knew. I moved on to manage 120 people before resigning to attend graduate school. Overall, it was another pivotal and rewarding sparring match with my dragon. I actually chose to do what I feared the most: phone use, conversations, introductions, oral presentations, and so on. I was desensitizing myself to stuttering and earning new confidence.

Later I would learn the process by which I would "grow a word fear." It helped me understand how I acquired feared words as a child; many still provoked anxiety as an adult at this stage of my recovery. In college and early careers, words such Henry Street, manager, and others entered my daily vocabulary. When I started stuttering on those words I would remember them using a phenomenon known as *somatic\* memory*. My brain filed them away as feared words. By attaching meaning and emotion to a stuttering event, I would remember it vividly. I would replay the moments in the cinema of my mind: hearing, feeling, and seeing the moments of stuttering. When encountering those words in the future I would feel anticipation in my stomach—a sort of panic sensation like the *fight or flight response*—and then avoid or speed up and stutter.

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\* "Somatic" means of, relating to, or affecting the body

## *SELF-HELP*

At this stage of my recovery, I was devouring materials from stuttering textbooks and from the Stuttering Foundation of America. I also organized the Atlanta chapter of the National Stuttering Association and served as its president for several years. Seeing successful business people who stutter helped to minimize my fear of gainful employment in the future. Opening up, talking about stuttering, and removing avoidance was essential to my recovery.

## *TOASTMASTERS*

Shortly after arriving in Atlanta, I decided to confront my biggest fear—public speaking. From eighth grade through undergraduate school, I had escaped, avoided, dropped classes, switched professors, and done everything else within my power to avoid speaking in front of a group. And I had been 100% successful.

Then one day in a local paper I found an advertisement for Toastmasters. The nearest chapter was in the president's boardroom of a local university. I knew nothing of the format for a meeting. I arrived wearing jeans and a hockey jersey.

Walking in late, I entered a room with wooden paneled walls and oil paintings. Everyone else was a professional and dressed in their work attire. I later learned most of them were realtors, attorneys, and sales people.

At the end of the meeting, I was asked to stand, introduce myself, and share why I was there that evening. The hounds had me in the tree, but this time I was going to bark out the words. The room started spinning, and I thought I was going to vomit. As I stood, I kept my vow and told everyone that I stuttered and that I wanted to improve my speech. I stuttered wildly through my introduction. After the meeting, several people came up, shook my hand, and told me they would support me.

I continued in Toastmasters for five years. There were breaks as I moved around in Atlanta and joined new club's closer to my dwellings. At the first meeting of each new club I joined, I would introduce myself and tell them I stuttered. I knew by disclosing that fact I was less prone to anxiety and avoidance behaviors. I earned two CTM degrees (Competent Toastmaster), an ATM (Able Toastmaster), and an ATM bronze. I competed in some local speech competitions and won many ribbons at the nightly meetings. I have a first-place trophy from a humorous speech contest.

When I first started Toastmasters, I was guilty of black and white thinking. After giving a speech I would judge my performance solely on how much I stuttered. If I had three or four significant stutters in a five-minute

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talk, I would beat myself up. It was a roller coaster the first year. Well-meaning people would give me feedback on my stuttering. They might say something like: “Tim, it’s not that bad. Just relax.” They had good intentions and wanted to help me, but because I was not open enough about the stuttering, I did not give them direction and guidance. It’s critical that the person who stutters “sets the frames (i.e.: framework)” for his stuttering. This means letting people know how to talk about it, when to talk about it, and anything else important to the person who stutters.

Communication is like dancing a waltz. Sometimes you have to ask your partner not to step on your toes. If you try to conceal your stuttering and act self-conscious about it, your dance partner may step on your toes without realizing it. Averting eye contact, substituting words, saying “um,” and other avoidances can discourage you from continuing the waltz.

I eventually got to where I transformed anticipation and fear into adrenaline. I would sit through the meeting eagerly waiting my turn to give a prepared speech. I volunteered at every meeting to do table topics or evaluate a speech. My black and white thinking started developing shades of gray. I was enjoying personal growth. Failure was replaced with feedback. If I slipped, I got right back up.

Speed skater Dan Jansen is a role model for me. In his late teens, after training since a child for the Olympics, he fell in Albertville, France. Four years later at the next Olympics, he learned his sister died moments before his race and fell again. Four more years of training, and his final Olympics, he fell during the race he was all but guaranteed of winning the gold. He had one more chance—the 1,000 meter race.

Dan was a distant third in the rankings for the 1,000. His sports psychologist told him to walk around saying “I love the 1,000.” His teammates and family were asked to listen and confirm he was saying it.

In his third Olympics and his final race, in an event where he was not favored, he won the gold medal. You may remember someone passing his baby to him to carry during a victory lap.

What was more important to him than falling? How could Dan keep getting up? How could he silence thoughts like “Others judge you...you’re a choker...you’ll never win.” His goal—the gold medal and personal redemption—must have motivated him to endure all the heartbreaks. In 1983, in Boca Raton, Florida, I saw my own freedom of speech as the gold medal I simply had to have.

## *GRADUATE SCHOOL*

I think I originally entered graduate school with the intention of learning to slay my stuttering dragon. I made an unreasonable goal of curing

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my stutter during graduate school. I was open about it, and all my classmates knew I stuttered.

Going into speech-language pathology (SLP) as a person who stutters has the potential to introduce a number of unique frames of thinking. Some of my “frames” were: “What will people think about a stuttering SLP?” “I must overcome it by the end of graduate school!” “How will my supervisors evaluate me in the clinic if I stutter with a client?” As a graduate student in the speech and hearing clinic we performed therapy while supervisors and parents observed through a two-way mirror. I quickly learned what it might be like to be a goldfish in a fishbowl. I was very self-conscious of the possibility of stuttering in front of the parents of the children I treated. It was the meaning and significance that I gave stuttering that was at the core of the problem.

I thought stuttering took away from my credibility. It was always a challenge for me to say “speech pathology” and “speech therapy” as I feared stuttering on those very words. That was because I was “mind reading.” Mind reading is presuming to know the reaction of the listener. Later, I realized the humor of introducing myself as a speech pathologist specializing in stuttering while I stuttered during it. Again, it came down to whether I personalized stuttering, whether it permeated my identity, whether I thought it took away from me as a person, and whether I would have less credibility if I kept stuttering.

During graduate school in 1991, I served as a clinician at the Successful Stuttering Management Program (SSMP) in Washington State. My eyes were opened to the power of directly confronting the stuttering. Under the supervision of Dorvan Breitenfeldt, Ph.D., the clinicians and the people who stuttered went out on the campus, telling people they stuttered (advertising), and interviewed these individuals, asking them what they thought about stuttering. Phone calls, speaking into a mirror, and trips to a shopping mall to interview people were all part of the program. One of the most important things I learned was that listeners did not react to my stuttering as I presumed they did. I learned to stutter on purpose. I learned to push myself further into speaking situations. The semantic meaning that I gave stuttering was further changing. By the time I left SSMP, I had taken several more swipes at my dragon.

### *LUNCH WITH DEAN WILLIAMS*

In 1992 in Knoxville, Tennessee I had the rare pleasure of having lunch with the late Dean Williams, a pioneer in stuttering therapy and a person who stuttered. With several other influential people sitting around, I built up my courage to ask him point blank, “What do you believe is the secret

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to overcoming stuttering?” He replied: “I’d want to know what I did when I stuttered.” At the time I felt almost cheated by the brief answer. However, as I drove back to Atlanta the next day, it dawned on me how profound his reply was. I still smile when I think how accurate he was. I am sure he was referring to whether I knew what I did *before, during, and after* the stutter. What thoughts and feelings preceded the stutter, what did I do during the stutter, and how did I reflect back on the blocks I experienced.

## *THE HOSPITALS*

My first position as a licensed speech pathologist began in 1992. I functioned as an acute care SLP, going up into patients’ rooms. I was also on a stroke team with other therapists, nurses, dietitians, and doctors. Reflecting back, this was also a critical period on my time-line.

The meaning I gave to being an SLP who stutters manifested in situational stuttering. My percentage of fluency and how I presented myself was much improved from when I began graduate school. Toastmasters and the SSMP were a big part of it. However, I still had specific speaking situations in which I consistently felt anxiety and stuttered.

One situation that speaks volumes about my status at that time was my level of comfort and fluency when at the bedside talking to a patient and the patient’s family. When a nurse walked in the room I was more self-conscious of my stuttering and, in turn, was more likely to block. Giving formal tests where I would have to read to the patient would trigger my stuttering, especially if the nurse were working in the room. This anxiety went right back to my experience of reading in middle school. The memory of those situations, especially the way I felt at the time (my somatic memory), still had enormous power to run my life.

Speaking to doctors brought out some of my worst stuttering. When they entered room, it was as though I were two people. If I had stuttered in front of that doctor before, I would remember that and get anxious. If I did not know the doctor, I would become anxious because I wanted to conceal the stuttering. Typically, I would have my worst stuttering when calling a doctor’s office for orders to see a patient.

This, of course, was a combination of my timeline of phone avoidance combined with the meaning that I gave stuttering as a speech pathologist. (A “stuttering timeline” is similar to the type of timeline you see in a textbook that records historical events along a horizontal line.) I believed that if a physician heard me stutter, he or she would think less of me and would give me less credibility. Typically, my stuttering would be triggered by the memory of a specific phone call 20 years previously in which I

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stuttered. The embarrassment and shame I had attached to these early calls explained my ability to recall them so vividly.

It was those early remembered feelings—the somatic memories—that explained why I had so much anxiety in my stomach and chest before calling. It was as if I were experiencing those early crises all over again. I believed that leaving a voice mail was worse than talking to a live person. If I stuttered, they would have permanent history of it. So I would mind read and presume that what I thought they thought was the actual truth. I later learned that these were only my projections.

One time when calling a doctor's office and introducing myself to the receptionist I had a massive block on my name and the title "speech therapist." In response to my stuttering, the nurse started laughing. I said, "May I presume you laughed because I stuttered while announcing myself as a speech therapist? I happen to be a speech therapist who stutters." When she began to apologize, I assured her that I might laugh, too, in the same situation. Perhaps she had thought it was a prank call at first. Considering she was a member of the general public with little or no knowledge about stuttering, I can now see the potential humor of the situation.

We started talking, and she told me her grandchild was starting to stutter. Using the internal mail in the hospital, I sent her materials from the Stuttering Foundation of America. We maintained a dialogue for a couple months as I continued to advise her and her daughter.

Her granddaughter benefited from my willingness to take a second perceptual position. What I mean by "second perceptual position" is that I considered what *her* experience might have been when I first called and stuttered. By considering the position of the listener, finding humor in it, and immediately forgiving her for laughing, I was able to turn the interchange into a win-win situation. Had I responded the way I traditionally did and ended the call with my tail between my legs, it would have been a loss, not just for the both of us, but for her grandchild as well.

One day I was talking to a neurologist with whom I had frequent interactions. As we sat at a nursing station he asked me why I had gotten into the field of speech pathology. He said I was the first male he had ever met who was an SLP. I told him that I stuttered and that I had gotten into the field to help myself and help others. He said, "You know, it seems to me I have heard you stutter a few times. And come to think of it, you are ideal for your job. When you go to see my patients who have had a stroke and cannot speak, you bring a compassion that others might not have." I remember that as being a very emotional moment. In fact, tears just welled in my eyes as I dictated that quote into my IBM voice recognition software.

That moment was like the proverbial hand slap to the forehead. In an instant, he reframed several years' worth of illogical thinking about being

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an SLP who stutters. Once in awhile people will say something seemingly simple that will suddenly change your mind. It was something I knew but was refusing to believe because of my habit of mind reading. That moment has continued to have a profound impact on my life.

Another profoundly important moment on my recovery time line was when I was going through orientation at a hospital and was told I would have to page people on the intercom. That meant several hundred people would hear me speak at once. As toxic thoughts entered my mind, the dragon belched his nasty breath. I took a quick inventory of the mental “frames” that controlled my thinking at that moment. They could be summarized as this: “If I stutter, people will ask who was that? Oh, it is the new speech pathologist stuttering. Who hired him? They’ll hire anyone!”

I knew I had to find a reason to page someone that very day. If not, I would develop a phobia. Even though I had no reference for an intercom in my life, I projected the fear based on past references of stuttering on telephones and at drive-through windows. I got ready to page respiratory therapy to a room I was working. My Linguistic Search Engine predicted I would stutter on “respiratory.” I felt panic. I decided to face the dragon head-on. I walked to the nursing station with a speaker directly above me, and several people sure to connect my voice and face to the intercom.

I looked right at a nurse and elongated the /r/ sound; getting the page out free of a stutter. It took great restraint to not do an end zone dance and spike the phone. A huge moment! My mental radar had picked up the toxic frames of thought, I faced the dragon, and slew it.

Over my first eight years as an SLP, I gradually improved my fluency and freedom of speech. In serving several hundred patients, only two times did a parent of the prospective client mention my residual stuttering on the phone during an initial contact as a reason why they would seek services elsewhere. I have lost track of the number of times parents of children who stutter and/or adults who stutter have cited my history as a reason why they *chose* to work with me. It was important to keep track of that ratio in my mind.

The phone was my last link in the chain. Sometimes I would go months at a time with relative ease introducing myself on the phone. Other times, the somatic memories of earlier catastrophes would fire up my anxiety, and I would really have to focus on my stuttering modification tools: easy onsets, light contexts, and pull-outs. They worked most of the time, but not always. During the recovery process, there are always times when the person’s anxiety is so overwhelming that his or her speech tools don’t work. This is why it’s necessary to develop strategies for running your mind as well as your speech.

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## NEURO-LINGUISTIC PROGRAMMING

I first tumbled on an NLP book in 1995. As I read it, I found descriptions of therapeutic processes that looked applicable to stuttering therapy. They talked about concepts such as re-imprinting painful memories, visualizing to prepare for future events, conversational reframing, learning how to relax in a matter of seconds, how to get into rapport with people, and how to manage your physical and mental state. I knew my stuttering was much more than simply a motor speech problem. There were too many inconsistencies in that theory. How could I be spontaneously fluent in so many contexts using no modification strategies at all? How did I “turn on my stuttering” consistently with certain people or in certain situations? How is it that specific words from childhood would still provoke a panic attack? NLP seemed to offer some of the answers.

NLP is an umbrella term that encompasses a myriad of therapeutic processes originating from the cognitive-behavioral sciences. The pioneers have utilized gestalt therapy, Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy (REBT), transactional analysis, Carl Rogers’ Rogerian-style counseling, reframing, and many other approaches. Drawing ideas from psychotherapy is not new to speech pathology, and desensitization to stuttering is absolutely critical to complete recovery.

After confirming the relevance of NLP processes to traditional speech pathology, I decided to earn my NLP practitioner certification. This was a 150 hour experiential, classroom process. The final weekend included an outdoor ropes course. Each activity on the ropes course was set up as a metaphor for change. We would identify an obstacle in our life—a thought or feeling. There was then a physical manifestation of that obstacle in the form of a challenge that we had to overcome. I started to change inside out. I began learning strategies to run my brain. All of this was applicable, not just to my own recovery process, but to my practice as well.

## 2001 TO NOW

By 2001, I had been using stuttering modification, desensitization, voluntary stuttering, and pushing myself into more speaking as my framework for recovery for 15 years. My stuttering had become so situational and context specific that I felt like it was just a matter of time before it was defeated. If I stayed focused on those last few targets, and figure them out, I would finally have spontaneity. I knew that closing the final loops would be difficult. Nevertheless, I knew there was no quitting now. As former Green Bay Packer football coach Vince Lombardi once said: “The harder you work, the harder it is to surrender.”

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I started corresponding professionally with Bob Bodenhamer, a trainer in NLP and neuro-semantics. Finally, I had found an authority on NLP who had a specific interest in helping people who stuttered. He helped me identify specific therapeutic processes in NLP to eliminate the thought patterns that led to stuttering. He put me through these processes and then taught me how to do them.

As I continued to resolve my remaining stuttering I noticed that my stuttering seemed to follow a *1-2-3 sequence*:

1. **Negative thoughts.** The circumstances leading up to a block usually began with a negative thought. After 15 years of hard work, my stuttering had become very context specific. I could pretty much name the people, places, and words I still stuttered on. The blocks were usually preceded by negative thoughts such as “I anticipate stuttering.” “I do not want to stutter with this person.” “This word is hard for me.”
2. **Anticipatory Anxiety.** This is also known as the General Arousal Syndrome or the fight-or-flight-response. My negative thoughts would instantly lead to anticipatory anxiety. When I anticipated stuttering, I always had a nervous sensation in my stomach that felt very much like panic. The level of panic was usually dependent on the situation.
3. **Choice Point.** Someone once said that “between a stimulus and a response is a choice.” In the past, once a thought about stuttering (#1) had created anticipatory anxiety (#2), I would do one of two things:
  - a) **Avoid:** use tricks like saying “um,” switch words, not raise my hand, and employ other strategies to try to not stutter. In this situation my intention was to protect myself from the pain of stuttering and more important, to shield myself from all the bad things that stuttering meant to me.
  - b) **Push and block:** this is the impulsivity that I had translated from mind into muscle. In a state of panic, to rid myself of my anxious feelings about stuttering, I would jump into a word and create some or all of my familiar stuttering symptoms (repetitions, blocks, facial contortions, eye contact aversion, etc.)

It is essential that a person who stutters slow down his mind and body so he or she can make different choices and practice new behaviors. This is called “interrupting the pattern” or “breaking state.” Thus, once I was in a moment of anxiety about stuttering, or actually stuttering, I had to find ways to interrupt this *process*.

Through traditional speech therapy I had learned to get myself out of a block by executing a “slide.” A slide is done by prolonging the first sound of the word with light contacts in the articulators and larynx. If I started to stutter, I would use a “pull-out”—that is, I would terminate the stutter, then pause and say the word again with a slide. After a pull-out, I would say the

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word again with a slide. But when my anxiety was raging, my mind went numb, and these strategies would become difficult and sometimes impossible to use. The classic strategies did help me reduce the severity of my stuttering over a 15 year period, but I found that even when using slides and pull-outs, there was still a level of tension in my larynx, mouth, and *abdomen*. The amount of anxiousness about stuttering dictated this level of residual tension. And ironically, the more I would try to prevent stuttering, the more tension I created.

Previously, I had never paid much attention to the sensations in my abdomen. I didn't think they were significant. I always focused on managing my stuttering in the area between my larynx and mouth using slides and pull-outs. But now, I was also doing my best to desensitize myself as well. I was seeing the importance of digging deeper and understanding my anticipatory anxiety.

Since the feeling of anxiety in my abdomen was a messenger telling me to use the slides and pull-outs, I wondered what would happen if I could remove that very anxiety. It made sense that the thoughts and feelings I had about stuttering that caused the anxiety was the core of my problem. Could I learn to say the words without any anxiety, residual tension, and without having to resort to slides and pull-outs? That's when I started changing my objective, moving away from focusing on motor speech strategies to removing the process that created anxiety.

My new choice was to use a neuro-semantic technique to resolve the anticipatory anxiety. It is called "Drop-Down Through," and it helped me reframe my thoughts to eliminate the panic sensation in my stomach *before* initiating speech. Now, instead of focusing on a fluency technique such as the easy onset, I focused all my energy and attention on the release of the anxiety. When the Drop Down Through technique was done effectively, the word was uttered with no residual tension in the articulators.

In the summer of 2002, I earned my master practitioner certification in NLP. This was a 14-day intensive course with Bob and L. Michael Hall.

## *WHAT I LEARNED*

Considering my family history of stuttering, perhaps I was predisposed to be at risk. However, I have learned what I believe to be the key contributing factors to my stuttering, and the necessary components needed to recovery. Here are some of the concepts, tools, and techniques that I've found useful.

**Somatic memory.** As mentioned earlier, this refers to the physical sensations associated with a past event—a kind of mental movie in which we can reexperience what a previous event actually felt like. Try

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it out. See if you can vividly recall a wonderful vacation or holiday. Notice the positive sensations. If it was a holiday at the beach, notice the warmth of the sun on your skin. Smell the salt air. Feel the sand under your feet. Thinking back on such pleasant moments will help you recall the good feelings associated with this earlier experience.

However, the reverse is also true. Recalling negative memories will trigger uncomfortable feelings. I started a list of specific situations, people, and words in which I anticipated stuttering. I clearly defined what these moments meant to me and identified the specific feeling patterns. For example, when I went to use the intercom at that hospital, even though I had never used one before, it brought back my phone phobia, which in turn, led me to feel like I would stutter. It also recalled my tendency to mind read what my listeners might think if I did stutter. My list of other feared situations included the telephone, reading aloud, oral presentations, specific girls names, my street name, my own name, and saying the word “stuttering.”

I began to see that if I sat in class “knowing” I was going to have to read aloud, my somatic memory would trigger the panic sensations associated with similar unpleasant experiences from the past. This is what inevitably led to my stuttering and blocking. My big question became—“What could I do about it?”

The good news is that negative memories can be cancelled out by overlying them with somatic memories of positive events. These “borrowed” positive feelings can help you transform a negative experience into a positive one.

**Anchors.** An anchor is a specific memory that allows you to tap into the feelings and meanings of a previous experience. For example, think of a favorite song. You can go back and fully experience where, when, and with whom you heard it, how you felt, and so on. You can choose to replay the song to reexperience what you felt like back then. The song becomes an anchor to that earlier, positive mindset. Going back to reexperience a past feel-good event explains why we like to repeatedly play particular songs, albums and movies.

Through many uncomfortable speaking experiences, I began to see how I had developed a stuttering timeline with anchors to many fearful words and situations. Whenever I experienced one of these stuttering anchors, I would slip into my familiar panic state. For example, when the assistant manager’s line rang at the hotel, I was instantly anchored to an earlier feared event, and I’d quickly slip into a state of panic.

On the other hand, if at the first sign of fear I could anchor myself to a positive experience from the past, I could short circuit that panic state and stop it from developing.

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**Time line.** Each situation in which I'd stuttered and endowed with embarrassment, shame, and frustration became another point on my stuttering time line. Eventually, this time line stretched over 30 years. Points on this time line were somatic memories and anchors for specific moments of stuttering, and they heavily influenced my present behaviors and choices.

For instance, how would I know to anticipate and avoid specific words or situations if not for previous references? Sometimes I would find myself drifting back and replaying past moments of stuttering or imagine that my stuttering was to blame for events that did not turn out as planned.

One thing that neuro-linguistic programming offered was an approach to time line re-imprinting. By going back and changing the meaning I gave to the stuttering that came up when I read aloud, and doing this all along the timeline, I eliminated the anticipatory anxiety that always preceded reading aloud. Today, it is very rewarding to read verbatim during an oral presentation or sit on the sofa with my children and read them stories without ever thinking about stuttering.

**Linguistic Search Engine (LSE).** This refers to the mechanism in our brain that allows us to instantly identify a feared word. The LSE is like a forward-looking radar on a jet fighter that's flying low to the ground. It scans ahead for potential dangers so it can take evasive action. With stuttering, it allows us to reach ahead and instantly identify the feared word. For instance, when I moved to Atlanta from Wisconsin, if I was suddenly asked where I was from, my LSE will alert me to a feared word (Wisconsin). I would panic and say "up north" or go into a block. Many people have told me how they look ahead of the passage they have to read and identify specific words they fear stuttering on.

By re-imprinting our somatic memories of feared speaking situations and removing negative meaning from them, we find it less and less necessary to fire up our linguistic search engine. The only reason we remember the stuttered words in the first place was because we applied meaning to that past moment of stuttering. Thus, when the search engine is not running any more, we remain more grounded and fully in the present.

**Reframing.** If stuttering events were emotionally neutral to us, would we recall stuttering and make choices to change words, look away, avoid, and the like? I think not. Anticipating stuttering, feeling panic, remembering specific words, sounds, speaking situations, and all other cognitive memories of past stuttering events are made possible only when we apply meaning (negative) to stuttering.

Alfred Korzybski, the developer of general semantics, said: "Human beings are a semantic class of life." What he means is that humans are programmed to endow their experiences with meaning. We do that by

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setting up frames-of-reference. Hence, it is essential to reframe the very meaning we have created for our stuttering. Remember how I thought that my stuttering meant having no credibility around doctors? That frame was what triggered the panic sensation and led to stuttering. Marcus Aurelius once said: "Men are not disturbed by things, but by their estimate of things." He meant the meaning we give things.

One part of the recovery process, then, is to reframe the meanings we give to the speech-related moments of our life — turning negatives to positives.

- **Breaking state.** I had to learn to identify when I was going into a stuttering state and break, or interrupt, that state. When I realized that I felt anticipation in my stomach prior to stuttering, it made sense to me to look into that and see what I could change. By using time-line therapy techniques, reframing, the Drop-Down Through process, and other neuro-semantic and NLP processes, I was able to gradually dissolve the panic feeling that preceded stuttering. My speech flowed more and more spontaneously without ever having to resort to my old fluency modification techniques. I just talked without interruption.

### *PEELING BACK THE LAYERS OF THE ONION*

In summary, it was essential that I re-imprint my time line—that is, reframe and revise the negative speech-related experiences covering many years—so that the memory of past stuttering disasters did not continue to cause anticipatory anxiety in my present life. Re-imprinting memories of stuttering erased many of the frames-of-reference they created for situations such as oral reading, telephone, and oral presentations.

Could Dean Williams have been planting this very seed in my brain in 1991 when he asked me if I wanted to know what I did when I stuttered? I like to think so. The evidence of my recovery is that I no longer think about stuttering nor do I rely on behavioral fluency strategies to produce modified fluency. I no longer even feel the sensation of anxiety in my stomach. I just talk.

At the time this article was written, March 2003, I have anticipated a stutter five times in the last six months. They were old references, old feared words that popped up in my linguistic search engine. One of them arose when I asked to speak the manager at a hotel. As I did with the other four occurrences, I used a neuro-semantic process like reframing or the Drop Down Through process to remove the anxiety, and I was able to speak fluently.

Today, before a public speaking engagement, my focus is on pushing myself to achieve excellent platform skills. I still have the normal, typical

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disfluencies that all speakers have (i.e., loose whole-word repetitions), but my blocking and struggle behavior are history.

This is further evidence of the power of clearing my head of stuttering thoughts. I am 100% confident that I am now cognitively Teflon-coated and relapse proof.

Having come this far, do I regret that I had to endure more than two decades of stuttering and self-punishment? Not really. Next to Christopher Reeve's ability to stay positive with quadriplegia and Victor Frankel's ability to reframe his experience after incarceration in a concentration camp, my story seems trivial, although I know it's not. I believe I am a more compassionate person, a better parent and spouse, and I love my work as a speech pathologist. The journey through stuttering has been a personal metaphor that will make all things possible for me.

The dragon's fire is out.

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*If you'd like to learn more about the various NS processes mentioned in this article, such as Drop Down Through, check the Institute of Neuro-Semantics website at [www.neurosemantics.com](http://www.neurosemantics.com). Tim Mackesey can be reached at [fluency@bellsouth.com](mailto:fluency@bellsouth.com); his website is [www.stuttering-specialist.com](http://www.stuttering-specialist.com).*

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## THE TROUBLE WITH MECHANICAL FLUENCY

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by Jeff Ingram

*[Fluency shaping programs have been around a long time, and for some it's an answer. For me they have a potential drawback in that so many of them only address the mechanical aspects of speech and not the entire the stuttering system. Tim Mackesey, a speech pathologist and recovered PWS, sent me this compelling piece written by one of his clients. Tim's therapy incorporates multiple modalities. He is a strong believer in cognitive therapy and is qualified as a Neuro-Linguistic practitioner. This piece is an excellent example of how keen observation led to a sharp distinction between fluency and "fluency." – JCH]*

Like many people I have met, I “graduated” from a renowned intensive fluency shaping program and relapsed. I was confused and felt guilty when I realized that practicing more and more of the same targets offered no solution. The only advice the program had after graduating was “practice targets more.”

Many of my underlying fears and anxiety were not addressed in the fluency shaping program. When I felt anxiety I was unable to control my tongue, lips, and vocal cords enough to use the targets. Countless fluency shaping grads have told me the same.

I had developed a sense of guilt after practicing the targets over and over and not getting tangible progress. Tim Mackesey helped me remove the mystery of stuttering.

The first presupposition of fluency shaping programs is that the person who stutters (PWS) will be able to be calm, resourceful, and able to control micro movements (targets) in feared situations. Every teen and adult PWS I have met has a long list of specific fears and triggers that lead to panic. I have learned this fear is called social anxiety, anticipatory anxiety, and/or fight or flight. My laundry list of fears and anxiety was not addressed in the fluency shaping program.

Fluency shaping appears to treat the symptom and not the root of the problem. Why do PWS change words and avoid talking? They fear stuttering. The topic matter in every support meeting I have been to for PWS is about fears and feelings about stuttering.

Back in the 80's, I attended the fluency shaping program...TWICE. It

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was very intense and very expensive. The premise of the program is to reconstruct speech by training students to talk extremely slow. For example, a one-syllable word would be stretched out for two seconds. As you progressed through the 3-week course, the syllables were shortened to one second and then half-second intervals.

One part of the program involved making phone calls to businesses and asking questions such as, "How late are you open?" At the end of the program, we went to a local mall and asked people more questions. All the time, trying to monitor the targets we learned (full breath and stretched syllable targets).

Although sometimes "fluent," the sound of our speech was monotone and robotic. I was somewhat fluent when I left the program. This might be deemed a success, if not for the short-lived duration of my fluency. The reality is the world talks at a much faster rate of speech, which made it even more difficult to monitor targets. Even after daily practice at home, using a stopwatch to count the duration of the stretched syllables, I sunk back into my old ways.

I figure the safety and insulation of being in a relatively comfortable stuttering environment for so many days created temporary decrease in fear. But, my specific fears, such as cold calling prospects and professional introductions, awaited my arrival home.

I have learned what an internal conflict is. It might also be called a split intention. The second presupposition, PWS like to talk with targets, is the culprit here. The often drone, elongated speech is very unnatural. I think those who stutter fear losing their identity when using glaring, elongated speech. Pacing of speech, pitch, and volume are the means through which people express their personality, isn't it? People resist losing this identity, which is why such robotic speech is unsatisfying.

The PWS is expected to return to his work, family, and social group with robot talk and act like nothing has happened. It is demanding a whole identity shift from the PWS.

As one of my fellow shaping grads said: "Targets bring more attention to my speech!" We "shapers" went along with the program but many of us had a voice in our head saying: "I'll talk this way here, but not at home." So, for many PWS the program is doomed because of internal conflicts.

I learned that my split intention can actually cause a speech block. I remember professional meetings in which we took turns introducing ourselves. I felt like I was in the middle of a tug-o-war: one side of me screaming "use your targets" and the other side saying "you will definitely stand out with targets so don't speak."

This reminds me of an athlete about to pitch a baseball, shoot a basketball, or putt a golf ball. Right at the moment when it's time for his

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motor skills to take over, he cannot have a voice saying "DON'T MISS IT." That voice in the individual's head that says "I will sound extra abnormal with elongated, drone speech" will cause an internal conflict which is likely to trigger a speech block.

When a PWS is in a panic trying to not stutter and not reveal himself, easy onsets and other targets are often impossible. He wants to talk, and at the same time he wants to hold back. When these forces are of equal strength and pull in opposite direction, he blocks.

Prior to meeting with Tim, I wasted money on an in-the-ear device. I saw the device portrayed on Oprah as a "medical miracle." I was frustrated with my fluency shaping experience efforts and wanted the fast relief I saw on Oprah. The device turned out to be a major distraction when trying to speak.

The background noise was intolerable. Anticipatory anxiety was again a culprit here: when anxious I could not focus on the echoed voice in my ear. I am in sales and the device failed when I need it the most! Again, this type of treatment doesn't address the emotional root causes of stuttering.

When I moved to Atlanta, in 2000, I looked up local speech therapy groups and came across speech pathologist Tim Mackesey. After just a few sessions with Tim, I began to finally discover how and why I blocked and stuttered. At the fluency shaping program, they focused solely on the physical aspect of stuttering. In contrast, Tim concentrated more on the anticipatory anxiety that makes focusing on speech targets so unreliable. He introduced me to Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) and Neuro Semantics (NS). NS is a new domain of NLP. NLP is like a big toolbox of strategies that help people change their thoughts and feelings that contribute to fear, and ultimately, to blocking.

In essence, you're reprogramming your brain to think about those experiences in a different way. If you reflect on an old memory of stuttering and still feel the same familiar emotions, that memory will effect how you feel about similar situations in the present. For example, when I was in high school, I remember doing oral book reports and stuttering terribly in front of the class. These traumatic experiences carried over into my adult life, causing me to fear talking in front of people...even small groups. Tim took me back in time (ie: back in my timeline) and created a new movie for my mind. We "reinterpreted" those moments and many other moments that were traumatic at the time they occurred. As a result, these memories no longer hurt.

Similarly, I learned how to reframe the experience of making a phone call and speaking at a meeting so today I no longer experience the same anticipatory anxiety. I may, like most people, feel an adrenaline rush but now I experience that rush as excitement and not fear. This process also applies to specific word and sound fears. I can now turn those early

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experiences into positive memories and bring them forward into my present life.

As a result, managing my blocking is MUCH easier because I know how to run my brain and be calm. What a fresh and effective way to work on stuttering!

I am pleased to say that I am very successful in sales now. I am also very active and very verbal in my church activities. I now understand stuttering, true control, and greater consistency.

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## MY JOURNEY TO HAPPINESS

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By Antonio Rasco

*[There is an old adage – “The proof of the pudding is in the eating.” One morning in mid-2011 I received this email from 36-year-old Antonio Rasco. Earlier, Antonio had read about the Stuttering Hexagon. It made sense to him, and he put the ideas into play with exceptional results. Antonio demonstrates how a simple shift in perspective can change everything. – JCH]*

“My name is Juan.”

Even though my name is Antonio, this is what I said to my university teacher when he asked me my name in front of the class. I was 22 at that time. Saying Antonio was a nightmare for me, and this was one of my many tricks to hide the fact that I had a stammer.

If I look back at my stuttering hexagon I realise how much work I have had to do to turn it from very negative to positive. This effort is definitely what is needed – not to be completely fluent, but to accept myself, be happy and be in control of my speech as a by-product.

I could talk forever of the many things I did to improve my quality of life, but I will try to fit the main points in a few paragraphs.

I analysed my thinking, my beliefs and consequently my behaviour. I challenged them, and I created the rule: Do not stop doing what I want to do because I have a stammer. That rule will be with me until the end of my days.

As an example, I used to think that people would tease me or would think I was stupid if I had a block. Of course you will encounter the odd one but my experience after facing many situations is that, quite simply, people don't care if you stammer. They're thinking about their own stuff. So if they don't care, why should I?

The most important thing I knew I had to do was to take action. In facing my fears, here are some of the things I did:

- Joined a speakers club
- Joined a squash league to have the opportunity to talk to many strangers
- Joined the speaking circles organised by the NHS

- Joined the McGuire program
- Read a lot of material like John Harrison's book, meditation books and books on NLP
- Made 5000 contacts in one year (stopping people on the street, asking questions in shops, phoning people I feared to talk to, etc.)
- Constantly make disclosures. I can now talk about my stammer as if I were talking about going on holiday.

The other day I went to an interview with a panel of three people. This situation would have been like a terror movie if I had faced it when I was the young guy at university. Well, this time I talked so much that they looked a bit tired of listening to me. I talked slowly, made a disclosure about my speech, and used my stammering to show them my ability to fight in life.

As it turned out, I did not get the job, but guess what. I did not care so much because when I left the interview I had my head held high. I felt proud. I said to myself: I couldn't have done better! I felt HAPPY.

If I compared Antonio at the interview to Antonio telling his teacher that his name was Juan, the difference is striking. I am the same person, but I'm supported by a much more positive hexagon.

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*In a follow-up email exchange, Antonio showed how well he really understands the functioning of the Stuttering Hexagon.*

ANTONIO: Would you say is it true that most people who stutter on their name do so because they do not have a strong sense of who they are, nor have they accepted many of their personal qualities into their self-image?

JOHN: I think you're right on both counts. Also, you're SUPPOSED to know your name, so there's a performance issue involved if you're afraid you can't say it.

ANTONIO: If your hexagon is not supportive, you see yourself, the entire you, as a less valid person. Your name is part of you, so we stammer because we do not feel proud of who we are.

JOHN: Once again, you're right on. By the way, what you say becomes even clearer if you substitute "hold back" for "stammer," something that I encourage people I coach to do.

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ANTONIO: I used to see myself as less valid, even if it had nothing to do with my stutter. A clear example: people who know me well used to say to me, "Why do you think you are not good or competent? Believe me, you are!!!" But I always thought that they were just being nice to me.

JOHN: I can identify with that. When I was 14 and going to summer camp, I remember there was an older kid named Lasker Harris who I admired who always was friendly to me when we bumped into each other. I always felt that he was being friendly because he knew that I was going to die (even though I didn't know it) and was only being nice to me to me because of that.

ANTONIO: After working on my hexagon I have realised that if I was able to learn a foreign language from scratch and pass high level strategic papers of an English Chartered Accountancy body, perhaps those people were not just being nice to me!

JOHN: It's amazing what you discover when your hexagon changes.

ANTONIO: I was totally blind when my hexagon was weak and that impacted my self-image quite badly, not only as a speaker but also as a human being.

JOHN: You understand the hexagon better than most people I've met.

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## MY DEVELOPMENT AS A PERSON WITH A STUTTER

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by Christine Dits

*[This piece appeared on the neurosemanticsofstuttering Yahoo discussion group and was written by Christine Dits in late 2006 while she was a senior in high school. It addresses a problem that confronts all PWS young and old—how can they explore their stuttering related issues with a sympathetic and understanding listener?*

*The problems are particularly poignant for school children who are living through a formative time when life attitudes and self-images are undergoing rapid and often painful transformation.*

*Today, the Internet provides powerful and comprehensive resources to help PWS, and especially, young people. This includes hundreds of on-line articles and many hundreds of people who are willing to share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences about their own stuttering.*

*In fact, with the availability of communication software like Skype and technology like the Internet camera, it's even possible for a PWS in Chicago to have a heart-to-heart, face-to-face phone conversation with someone in Sydney or Prague or Johannesburg...and all for free.*

*One of the best places for people of any age to share their thoughts, ideas, and feelings about their stuttering is the neurosemanticsofstuttering Yahoo group. You can join the group by registering at <http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/neurosemanticsofstuttering>. – JCH]*

**M**y name is Christine Dits, and I am an 18-year-old person with a stutter. I began stuttering when I was between the ages of six to nine when my aunt and grandma noticed how I would freeze up when it was my turn to speak. I noticed myself repeating a lot of syllables and sounds around the age of 12 and 13. This was also the time when my parents decided to divorce. I mention this because I believe that my parents' divorce undoubtedly had an effect on my stuttering hexagon, John Harrison's model for stuttering.

The stuttering hexagon is the system that describes the emotions, behaviors, perceptions, physiological responses, intentions, and beliefs of a person with a stutter. John believes that it takes only one point on the stuttering hexagon to be shaken, disrupted, or out of place to put the PWS

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into a state of blocking and stuttering. I can say that I have felt this happen at many moments in my life.

One particular instance I remember was the night I was eating dinner with about nine adults, including my dad and my sister. I was sitting quietly, somewhat timidly, not contributing much to the overall conversation until I decided to say something.

I began telling everyone about this movie I had seen, *I Heart Huckabees*. Right when I got to saying the title of the movie, I uncontrollably stuttered on “heart” about four or five times. I was stuck on “I Heart” for a while, and I know I must have sounded like a fool. I could feel the blood rush to my face and the whole situation closed in on me in this over-magnified moment of stuttering.

I felt myself going unconscious, a very common feeling that PWS have when stuttering or blocking. My sister, sitting right next to me, kindly helped me out, and I finished the phrase with her help. Although it would have been nice to finish the phrase on my own, I desperately needed someone to step in for me. I was completely and utterly embarrassed.

In this situation, my childhood beliefs were holding me back from expressing myself clearly and calmly. I harbored a deep unconscious belief that adults were superior, smarter, and more articulate than I. My intentions in that moment were to impress all the adults there with fluent, intellectual speech, when in reality, they probably did not even expect that out of me at all. They just wanted to visit with me, as well as everybody else, and enjoy the good food. Who cared whether I stuttered or not?

### *I RECOGNIZE A PROBLEM*

Midway into my sophomore year in high school, I finally realized I had a problem with speaking. I became very aware of the fact that I thought about how I spoke more often than I should. I also noticed that I would repeat the beginnings of a lot of words and phrases more than usual. “What was wrong with me?” I thought, over and over again.

Interestingly, I was okay enough with my so-called stuttering problem (what I eventually came to call it) that I would talk with my friends about it on various occasions – at lunch, in class, in the halls. I know I did not worry as much about this stuttering problem as I did the next year of high school, my junior year.

I remember praying all during the summer going into my junior year that my stuttering would just go away. To my surprise, it actually did to a great degree. I became very social that summer and always had a strong desire to be around people. However, in the fall of my junior year, the stuttering came back to haunt me. I was under the stress and pressures of

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school and the need to fit in again and, thus, began holding back my expressive, fluent self that had just been blossoming a few weeks earlier.

In early September of my junior year, as I was browsing the Internet, I came upon a yahoo group called [neurosemanticsofstuttering.com](http://neurosemanticsofstuttering.com). This was a place where one could speak with hundreds of other PWS on how to overcome stuttering. I joined the group immediately and began sending posts weekly. Over the weeks and months I gained a greater understanding of stuttering and how to relinquish my own stuttering problem, once and for all.

I am still quite active in the [neurosemanticsofstuttering](http://neurosemanticsofstuttering.com) group, which is now about 700 members and growing. I have engaged in many interesting and intellectual conversations about stuttering—how to get rid of it, what techniques are the most beneficial, where to go to find further help, and how to get through those “tough” days. I have met speech language pathologists, NLP (neuro-linguistic programming) practitioners, adults with kids who stutter, adults who stutter, other kids my age who stutter, and most especially, adults who have already overcome their problem with stuttering. I am eager to speak to my fellow group members every week and learn more about this confusing issue called stuttering.

### *HOW I’VE BENEFITTED*

The [neurosemanticsofstuttering](http://neurosemanticsofstuttering.com) group has helped me grow so much, not only as a person with a stutter, but also as a woman, a friend, a confidant, and a person. I have learned how to communicate better with my brother, how to teach people to be patient with me when I stutter, how to stand up for myself when someone is making fun of me, and, most importantly, how to speak more confidently, expressively and truthfully.

I have been given the names of highly-recommended books to help PWS overcome feelings of shame, fear, sadness and embarrassment. I have read numerous uplifting quotes to help me get through those tough days. I have been given various article links and websites to check out to help me further my education of stuttering.

Most importantly, I have conversed with many understanding people from the group who have given me a reason to make the choice to overcome stuttering. These people have also provided me with lots of support and guidance on those upsetting days. I found and am still finding inspiration and motivation in everyone I come in contact with in the [neurosemantics](http://neurosemanticsofstuttering.com) group.

I have made many close friendships and am indebted to these people for all the help, support and love they have given me over the past 15 months. The [neurosemanticsofstuttering](http://neurosemanticsofstuttering.com) group got me on my feet so I could finally

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start overcoming my stuttering issues, and I am so very grateful.

In addition to the discoveries I have found in the group, I have also made some discoveries in going to speech therapy. I started going to speech therapy in September of 2006. I thought that speech therapy would be the final piece to the puzzle of stuttering, but it was not. I do not want to discourage speech therapy, by any means, but I do want to warn those that therapy alone may not be the solution or the cure to one's stuttering problem.

Granted, people have overcome their stuttering with just speech therapy, but in my case I did not. I have only been in speech therapy for about three months, so I cannot tell you when I will overcome my stuttering, or even if I will, just by going to therapy. Nonetheless, I did and still am making great improvements, even after only a month or two of meeting with my speech therapist.

In speech therapy, I learned many techniques and tools to modify my stuttering, enhance my fluency, and ultimately increase my self-confidence. I talked about my goals with my speech therapist and gradually began accomplishing them. Since I have only been in speech therapy for the past couple of months and am only meeting about once a week, I have not had the chance to get out yet and really practice my techniques with my family, friends, and even strangers, which is one of my major goals. However, I did have the opportunity to go to the library once and practice my techniques, which went very well. I experienced little fear and felt empowered after the exchange between the library clerks and myself.

The library clerks only smiled and smirked a little when I began stuttering. However, I know my stutter did not bother them nearly as much as it was bothering me.

They probably did not even think anything of it. Remember, people really do not mind that much at all that we stutter. Because we ourselves are accepting it, once they pick up on it and accept it, they will continue to treat us like everybody else – like the next fluent person out there.

### *IT'S ALL ABOUT COMMITMENT*

Like any desperate-to-be-fluent PWS, I expected quick results. I soon learned that reconditioning one's speech takes time. We, as PWS, cannot just expect the stuttering that is so natural to us and that we are so familiar with to just go away simply by practicing a pull-out technique here or an easy onset there.

At first I expected a quick change, but I did not see the results I so desired. I was kidding myself. I was running on my expectations and not my intentions. I expected success quickly and when it did not come, I was

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extremely disappointed.

Instead, as John Harrison would say, *allow your intentions to run you, not your expectations, because then you are not setting yourself up for disappointment; keep your goals clearly in front of you and your motivation alive*. I am just beginning to do this, and I am finding more peace within myself and with the world around me. I have finally come to terms with the fact that stuttering is a part of me. It is what makes me Christine, and it is ultimately a lifestyle with which I must work.

## *I HAVE CHOICES*

Even though stuttering is my lifestyle at the moment, I do not allow it to control me, nor do I let myself run off of my old stuttering mindset. I now have the choice to either deny my stuttering and any hope for improvement for the rest of my life, or to learn ways to deal with it, control it, and live with it. I have chosen the latter, of course, because I know there is hope for me. I have accepted my stuttering, even if I do not like it at times, and I have made the decision to live my life, despite a little stuttering problem.

The most recent thing that has happened to me because of speech therapy is a shift in how I view myself and my stuttering. At the beginning of the speech therapy program in September, my goal was to eventually become fluent. My goal now, in the middle of December, is to become *satisfied* with myself when speaking.

I see this goal as a much more realistic and healthy goal, and my therapist wholeheartedly agrees. Choosing to be satisfied with my speech is more realistic, simply because *no one* is absolutely and entirely fluent. Striving for a goal to always be fluent was too good to be true and virtually impossible. My advice to all PWS out there is to take time to ask yourself what your ultimate goal is for yourself.

Remember that you are really the only person that matters. You have to live with yourself for the rest of your life. It's you, and only you, who will determine what that life will look like and how you are going to feel about yourself day in and day out.

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## A LABOR OF LOVE

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by Richard Parent

**B**ack in the mid-80s I was translating articles about stuttering into French<sup>1</sup> for a self-help group in Montréal when I first ran into John Harrison's original article on the Stuttering Hexagon. Translating the article was for me a real breakthrough as it was the very first time that someone recognized the nature of stuttering and that it was, in fact, a multi-faceted system. I had suspected that my moderate stuttering was more psychological than speech mechanics, but I didn't know what to do because I was unable to clearly define it. The Stuttering Hexagon article gave me what I needed to start my journey.

Shortly after, I acquired one of the very first editions of John's public speaking manual<sup>2</sup>. Since the weekly meetings for our self-help stuttering group seriously lacked direction, I translated the 10 exercises and organized a group to experiment with the exercises. The experience went over big with all those who attended. At 40 years old, I discovered that not only was I able to speak in front of others, but that it was actually fun. What a discovery for a PWS!

A year after that I enrolled in a Toastmasters Club. Wow! Another discovery. This four-year experience changed my idea of who I was. I became more connected with my Real Me. From an introvert and non-assertive person who always felt compelled to please others, I suddenly realized that I did not have to limit my life because of my occasional stuttering. I was able to evolve as an individual and as a more lively and effective speaker. Toastmasters was what I needed to heal my "inner person."

Wishing to share John's insights with others, we invited him to Montréal in June of 1994 in cooperation with the Montréal Jewish General Hospital. He addressed the Québec professional community (about 30 SLP's) and facilitated the workshop that he was giving throughout major U.S. cities. It was a real success and very well attended.

Then there was a 14-year silence when John and I barely remained in touch. We exchanged Christmas cards, but each of us was busy living his own life.

Then in 2008, I discovered that John's book had been growing all these years and had now expanded to over 500 pages. Since John was continuing

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to make his book available as a free PDF, I downloaded it and e-mailed my appreciation. His reply was instantaneous: “Hey Rick! Would you have an interest in translating some of these articles into French?” Of course, I agreed.

So I set to work, beginning with the articles that appealed most to me. At that time, neither John nor I had any expectation that I would translate the whole book. But I was to quickly discover that each and every article was interesting. I was able to see myself reflected in every comment written by John and his contributors. At some point I realized I had to translate the whole book. And that’s what I did. Like the English edition, the French version is also a free download.

In addition, I began spreading the concept of the Stuttering Hexagon to the French-speaking world, and we receive many rewarding testimonies, mostly from Africa, a continent lacking in resources for PWS. I also helped to bring about the Spanish translation of the book by connecting John with Araceli Herrera who translated it for the *Fundación Española de la Tartamudez*, thus spreading the concept of the Stuttering Hexagon to a whole other part of the world.

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<sup>1</sup> French is my native language, and translation is my avocation.

<sup>2</sup> Now incorporated as part of this book

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## How Did the Traffic Light Turn Green?

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by Hazel Percy

The question “how did the traffic light turn green?” could well be the first line of a joke! However, I find the traffic light a very apt metaphor to use when relating my journey towards overcoming stuttering. My hope is that, as I tell my story, other people who stutter (PWS) will in some way find help and encouragement through what I share.

### RED

I am 40 years old, married, live in the UK and have blocked and stuttered since early childhood. Although mild to begin with, the problem grew in severity during my teenage years. From that time on, I increasingly felt stuck on ‘red’ in many areas of my life, unable to move forward because of my fears around speaking.

As I stuttered in every speaking situation I was in (except when on my own, although that wasn’t always a totally block-free zone), I felt very restricted when considering my life choices. For example, my choice of jobs was based not on my abilities or interests, but on how much speaking would be involved. I chose the easy route of avoidance and consequently remained in jobs I often found boring, unfulfilling and ‘not really me’.

Whilst at work I would sometimes avoid making business phone calls, and when I did pluck up the courage to do so, I found it embarrassing, humiliating and a considerable physical struggle to speak.

Social situations were difficult too, even in the comfort zone of my own home with close family and friends. Many a time I would stay quiet when I had something to say, because I knew that as soon as I opened my mouth to speak, the physical struggle would begin, leaving me feeling emotionally and physically drained.

If I saw our next-door neighbours out in their garden, I would often avoid speaking to them. Either I would wait until they had gone back in, before going outside myself; or I might pretend that I hadn’t seen them, or that I was just too busy to speak.

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What must they have thought! It wasn't that I wanted to be unfriendly; I just felt too embarrassed and scared to speak and stutter in front of them.

Soon after our first daughter was born, in June 1999, I clearly remember saying to my husband that he would have to read all the bedtime stories. There was no way I could envisage myself being able to do it. All in all, because of my stuttering, I saw myself as being 'less than' other people and inadequate as a person. As a result of this, I would always push myself harder than necessary in other ways, to try to compensate for my lack of speaking ability.

Being an overt and relatively severe PWS did however have its advantages. It meant that only on the odd occasion would I substitute a 'difficult' word for an 'easier' one. To me, all words could be difficult to say, so most of the time I saw no point in trying to change them! The only exception to that being our wedding day, when the fear of stuttering in front of so many people was so high. On that occasion, the marriage ceremony was reworded in such a way that all I had to say on my own was 'I do', then repeat some words in unison with my husband to be, which of course I had no difficulty in doing.

Being this way in the world gave me great motivation to try and change the way things were. In my teens I had several sessions of traditional speech therapy, but these proved to be unhelpful. Also, in my twenties I attended several courses in the UK run by someone who had overcome his own stuttering problem. Although this was of some help, in that it allowed me to converse more easily with close family and friends, the speaking method I was taught was so abnormally slow that it was often impractical and difficult to use in real life outside situations. Over time, I gradually let go of it and returned to my old ways.

However, in September 2000 when I was 34 years old, my life took a dramatic turn. I heard about the McGuire Programme; a programme that addresses both physical and psychological aspects of stuttering, and felt that I should give it a go. After all, I had absolutely nothing to lose. It was during my first course that I believe I changed from 'Red' to 'Amber'.

## *AMBER*

For me, the 'Amber' stage lasted nearly five years and was a time of change in many ways. It was also a time of preparation, to enable me to change further and move on to 'Green,' or 'Go', but more about that later. Joining the McGuire Programme gave me the first taste I had had in years, of what life could be like without blocking and stuttering.

During the four day course I heard myself speaking with a freedom I had only dream't about; not only in the 'classroom setting', but out on the

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streets with the general public and even public speaking in the town square! For the first time since early childhood, I knew that I was physically able to say the exact words I wanted to say whilst in the presence of another person; and that was a strange and wonderful experience for me!

From that point on, I knew my life would never be the same again; and it wasn't.

On returning home, I found that I was able to maintain my newly found freedom in a fair number of speaking situations. However, at the same time I found it physically and mentally tiring to do so, and sometimes I would look at other 'normal fluent speakers' and wonder; "why do I have to use all this physical effort to speak, when others can speak so easily?" Furthermore, despite my best efforts, I sometimes found it hard to maintain my newly learn't technique in certain situations; and I didn't understand why!

At the time, I believed that stuttering was caused by some sort of physical brain malfunction, and that controlling the physical behaviour was the only way forward. Also I was pretty much oblivious to any thoughts I had prior to blocking. Over the years, they had grown outside my conscious awareness. Furthermore, although I always felt anxious and tense before and during blocking/stuttering, I in no way equated these as being contributory factors to the cause of the behaviour. However, my eyes were soon to be well and truly opened when in 2003, I read John Harrison's book *How to Conquer Your Fears of Speaking Before People* [now renamed *REDEFINING STUTTERING*]

For me, John's book answered a lot of questions about the nature of blocking and stuttering; and for the first time in my life, I changed the belief that my speech problem was being caused by some incurable brain disorder. Instead, I came to believe that it was a self-supporting system ('stuttering hexagon') which I had created and sustained over many years. John's story of his own recovery and his unique insight into the problem, brought real hope to me that one day I could be completely free too!

Having been very inspired by John's book, it also threw a spanner in the works for me. Knowing what I now knew, what course of action should I now take? Should I change direction in my recovery? After all, I was going along the road of controlling the blocking symptoms, but what if that wasn't the right way forward for me? And so began several months of inner conflict and turmoil as, with John's support and help, I began to think this issue through. Although I remained loosely connected to the McGuire Programme, I was very unsure of the right path to take. Things came to a head in June 2004, whilst having a meal in a large room of 100 people or more. Everyone seemed to be chatting away and having a good time; all except me. There I was, sat at the table, feeling frustrated and trapped; so afraid to be seen openly stuttering in front of people. Something had to

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change - and soon!

Around that time I started looking on the Internet to see what else was 'out there' to help PWS and came across the Neuro-Semantics website ([www.masteringstuttering.com](http://www.masteringstuttering.com)). I started reading the articles there about blocking/stuttering and was soon addicted to reading everything I could on the subject! What I read made so much sense to me and furthered my understanding of blocking.

Tim Mackesey's testimony particularly caught my attention and during the summer of 2004, I arranged to have several telephone consultations with him. It was during these that I first started applying Neuro-Semantic/NLP patterns to my speech problem. Tim led me through various patterns including the Drop Down Through and the Meta Yes/ Meta No. However, what I found most helpful at that time was Time-Line Re-imprinting. Using this pattern I spent considerable time alone at home, reframing past hurtful memories of blocking. I also gave any hurt I still felt in relation to these, to my highest spiritual resource, and forgave the other people involved for any hurt they had inadvertently caused me. Of course I also needed to forgive myself; for I realised that more often than not, through my 'mind-reading', I had judged my listener far too harshly!

As a consequence of doing this, and with Tim's help, I gradually began to change my perceptions of other people and in particular, of their reactions if I stuttered. Also I decided to do an experiment. Over several weeks, I telephoned numerous shops and businesses; making general and fairly short enquiries, whilst deliberately allowing myself to openly stutter. The aim was to observe how my listeners reacted to my non-fluency. I have to admit that I was amazed at the result! Nine times out of ten, there was no reaction whatsoever. People listened and appeared to be more interested in what I had to say, rather than how I was saying it! The only reaction I did notice was the occasional "pardon", if they hadn't quite caught what I'd said. Similarly, I made several enquiries in local shops. I always maintained eye contact throughout, smiled, looked as confident as I could, and said what I wanted to say. Again I allowed myself to openly stutter, and again people seemed to respect me and listened to what I had to say.

Also around this time, I enrolled on a public speaking course at my local college, which consisted of 30 evening classes held over a year. My aim was to further desensitise myself to stuttering in front of a group of people. As the course progressed, I discovered from the feedback I received, that I could come across as confident, relaxed and sound interesting, even though I stuttered. My prior judgement of other people's reactions to my stuttering had been totally wrong, and as a

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result, my perceptions changed. Other people were simply other people, just like me, no doubt with their own worries and problems. Of course, I know there is a minority of people in this world who aren't so patient and understanding when faced with PWS (maybe through their own lack of knowledge about stuttering), but how they react is totally their responsibility.

When the sessions with Tim ended, I was again faced with the dilemma of what to do next. I was still very much interested in Neuro-Semantics but was also very aware that I needed to uncover the negative thoughts, beliefs, perceptions and emotions that were underlying my blocking. For at that time, I had very little idea what they were. In due course I contacted John Harrison again, and via e-mail he helped to steer my thinking in such a way that I began to get a glimpse of what was really going on under the surface. John also suggested that I join the neurosemanticsofstuttering e-mail list. So in December 2004 I subscribed; and wasn't that the right decision!

And so began six months of very deep thinking! I had so many questions to ask, and found that the answers I got from various people on the list were really insightful, helpful and very thought provoking. Then came the night of January 8th 2005! Lying in bed, it was as if the floodgates of my mind suddenly opened! It felt as if a torrent of buried negative beliefs and perceptions about myself came rushing to the surface all at once. Among other things, it became clear that I was always craving for other people's approval of me (a sign of low self-esteem). Also, I feared social rejection and felt inadequate as a person because I stuttered. This process continued on and off throughout the night. Of course I had to write it all down, so by the morning I felt a bit of a wreck! I also felt quite overwhelmed by it all. Here in front of me, was a huge mountain of negative 'stuff' relating to myself and my blocking that needed to be dealt with. For a few moments I thought I was going to 'lose it!' But I managed to keep my sanity (I think). I realised that I needed to work through all of this with a therapist, and because Bob Bodenhamer and myself share the same Christian faith, I felt that I should approach him.

In due course I had several telephone consultations with Bob, over a period of five months. I realised that I had intertwined my identity as a person with my blocking and stuttering behaviour, and they needed separating. During the sessions, Bob would often have me associate into a memory relating to blocking (sometimes from childhood), then lead me through the Drop Down Through Pattern. I was utterly amazed at the negative thoughts, feelings and identity statements that came to mind, as I dropped down through each layer. Some I didn't even be-

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lieve, until Bob explained that they were coming from the child part of me. Then I applied my highest spiritual resource to each of the negative thoughts, feelings and identity statements. As I did so, the latter disappeared and were replaced with positive and more powerful ones. I continued this process at home also, working through other memories as and when they came to mind. In this way, my identity as a person gradually became separated from my blocking behaviour. As a result of this, I realised that I was a person of worth no matter how I talked, and that I no longer needed other people's approval of me.

Following on from the sessions with Bob, I continued to spend more time mentally in the presence of my highest resource. As I did so, this new perception of myself was reinforced, and my self-esteem increased further. But then I reached a point yet again when I wasn't sure what the next stage was. I now felt OK as a person and had positive beliefs about myself, even though I stuttered. But I was still stuttering on most words, although by this stage, the blocks were short and with very little tension. Perhaps being a bit of a sceptic, I wasn't convinced that the blocking behaviour would naturally fade away that easily! I also began to miss hearing myself speaking relatively fluently at least some of the time. So I decided to become more committed to the McGuire Programme again; a decision that I know was the right one for me. Gradually, with the help of friends on the programme, I started to regain more fluency but I still felt there was something missing.

In September 2005, I attended Bob's 'Mastering Blocking and Stuttering Workshop' in London. It was excellent and as I listened to the teaching and took part in the group work, I realised that I had indeed changed on the inside. It confirmed the fact that I had quite radically changed the beliefs about myself over recent months, and that my identity as a person was definitely no longer related to how I spoke.

I also found being led through the Power Zone Pattern really helpful. It reinforced in my mind, the fact that I and I alone have control over what I think and feel, and how I behave and speak. I also realised how important it was to give other people permission to own their powers too, instead of trying to 'mind-read' what they may or may not be thinking. Although what other people thought of me was now no longer a key-issue in my life, it was good to be reminded of this.

At the workshop, I had the privilege of meeting John Harrison for the first time. Over the past couple of years or so, he had got to know 'where I was at' speech-wise, and as we spoke he made the observation that I was holding myself back, particularly in relation to my volume. Having had years of stuttering, I had grown accustomed to speaking in a fairly quiet voice (or not speaking at all!). I usually didn't want to be

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noticed or stand out in a crowd, especially when I spoke. However, I didn't think this had much significance. To me it sounded natural to speak that way because I had always done it. But I trusted John's insight and so, at the end of one of the day's sessions, I allowed him to lead me through a volume experiment, in front of a few of the other participants. This involved doubling my volume several times and then observing my, and other people's perception of how I was coming across.

I found that experiment immensely valuable. I realised that my perception of how I sounded when I spoke was considerably different from other people's. I thought I was coming on too strong and too loud but they thought I just sounded more confident and more alive when I spoke. I decided that after the course ended, I would start using a 'bigger' voice in the outside world and see what effect that would have. I also realised that I needed to practise putting more expression into my voice. Again, having stuttered for so many years, I had never developed this 'skill'. My only concern had been; "how do I get these words out?" As a result, I had grown accustomed to talking in a rather monotone way.

Something else that John said during one of the sessions really struck a chord with me. He emphasised that blocking could also be seen as a form of holding back, of sucking in one's energy in an attempt to blend into the background and become 'invisible'. I recognised that this had certainly been true in my case over the years. I had always had reservations about putting the 'real me' on show too much, even in nonspeaking situations. By this stage too, I had pretty much desensitised myself to blocking and stuttering in front of people. I no longer felt embarrassed, and didn't particularly fear doing it in front of people; yet the behaviour was still there, and it was an inconvenient way of expressing myself!

Of course the opposite of holding back is letting go, and I realised that by speaking in a louder voice, I would be doing just that. But I now felt ready to take that next step. So as I returned home, I turned up the volume! At first it felt really strange and overly loud to me, but as I kept persevering with it over several weeks, I gradually got more used to it. I also noticed that when I did speak in a louder voice, I felt more confident and actually found it easier to speak. I then started to enjoy speaking in the new way and eventually reached the point of preferring it to the old!

With increased confidence, I decided it was now time to tackle the one and only speaking situation that I was still avoiding. Since joining the McGuire Programme, I had more or less given up the practise of avoiding situations, though sometimes I postponed going into them!

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However, there was one situation involving speaking in front of a particular small group of people, which I had been intending to go into for months. Yet when the time came, I always 'chickened out'. I hadn't been following through my intentions and I knew that this was having a negative effect on my 'hexagon'. So one evening I took the plunge; and as I did so, it wasn't half as scary as I'd imagined. In fact I quite enjoyed it and have been frequently entering and speaking in that situation ever since. No more situation avoidance for me! I was pleased with the progress I was making; yet just around the corner there was another surprise in store for me!

Last November, I went on my first McGuire Programme course in nearly five years. Again I realised just how much I'd changed during that time. I now felt much more comfortable speaking with people; not just people on the course, but absolutely anyone! I also took on board two more tools. During the course the instructor, Martin Coombs, emphasised the need to use 'deliberate dysfluency'; that is, choosing to prolong the first sound of a word or words, or imitating a block, immediately releasing it and saying the word again. The point of this was to advertise ourselves as people recovering from stuttering, but in a dignified and controlled way, without genuinely blocking. As he spoke, I realised that I felt uncomfortable about doing that. It was one thing to not mind stuttering in front of other people, but it was really 'pushing the boat out' to put in extra pretend blocks and stutters that wouldn't normally be there! But I realised the fact that I felt uncomfortable, indicated that I needed to do it!

Secondly, we were shown a way to deepen the tone of our voice whilst saying a word, which I found very helpful. Although I was already aware of these two tools, I had never really put them into practice. With these two extra tools now to hand, I returned home and started putting into practise what I'd learn't. It was then that I realised that during that course, everything had come together for me. I had turned a corner and had changed from 'Amber' to 'Green', or 'Go!'

## *GREEN*

As I started to use deliberate dysfluency in every speaking situation and became even more open about my stuttering, I discovered just how empowering that was! I was now in the driving seat. I could choose to prolong or not prolong whichever sounds I liked. Or I could imitate a block and release it, without experiencing the real, 'out of control' blocking. It was so liberating and fun to do! I was also outwardly demonstrating to people that I was someone who sometimes stutters,

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but in the way that I chose. I also discovered that I now had an insatiable desire to talk and talk and talk!

As the days went by, I noticed that there was a consistency in the way I spoke. I went into all sorts of situations and was able to maintain my new way of speaking most of the time. Furthermore, I no longer found it the great physical and mental effort that I had five years ago. This time round it felt a lot more natural and easier to me; I think, because of the internal changes that had taken place in my mind.

I started going along to Toastmasters and on the second occasion, was invited to take part in the table topics session. I jumped at the chance! I got up and spoke in front of 30 or so people I hardly knew, using deliberate dysfluency, and gave a short humorous talk. My speaking was absolutely fine. In fact I was even voted the best table topics speaker of the evening! In December, I read out a poem in front of some 400 people at church. Again, everything went great and I loved every minute of it! And so it has continued.

Sometimes I have the occasional minor 'hiccup' here and there, but nothing serious and it in no way affects my everyday life. If I do notice myself starting to hold back for whatever reason, I either reframe the situation while I'm in it, or analyse afterwards what was going on in my mind. I always find that some slight approach/avoidance conflict had been going on. Sometimes it has merely been the fact that as I've started to present myself differently in a speaking situation, I've been aware of displaying the 'real Hazel' like never before; and because that's a fairly new experience for me, it's felt uncomfortable. As a result, I've sometimes had the slight tendency to try and block out those feelings by holding myself back. However, I realise that I need to allow myself to feel uncomfortable; it is only a feeling! Also, I know that the more I do this, the easier it will get. Whatever the reason for holding back, I learn from the experience and then take whatever action is necessary the next time I'm in a similar situation.

As I look back over the past five years, I realise that at different stages, I've been addressing each point of my 'stuttering hexagon' and making each one more positive. Neurosemantics in particular has played a key role in helping me to change my beliefs about myself, and my perceptions of other people. At this point, I'd like to take the opportunity to thank Bob and Tim for all their help and for all that they do to help PWS. I'd also like to thank John too, whose unique insight has tremendously influenced and helped me, particularly in the area of my perceptions and emotions. And of course all my colleagues and friends on the McGuire Programme, who have helped, supported and inspired me in so many ways.

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I'm very aware that this new way of speaking and presenting myself to the world continually needs to be reinforced day by day, so that eventually it becomes habituated and second nature. Which is why I now enjoy pushing out my comfort zone and making the most of every speaking opportunity. For example, whenever I'm in a shop I will usually start chatting with the shop assistant (providing there isn't a long queue behind me!). If I'm in a queue waiting to pay for something, I will often pass the time of day with the person in front or behind me. And I love chatting with the parents at the school gate, when I pick my children up each day.

How different life is now! Instead of waking up each morning with a sense of heaviness, wondering how I'm going to get through each speaking situation, I now wake up looking forward to enjoying speaking as much as possible. At last, I am able to show other people my true colours!

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## BEFRIENDING MY MONSTER WAS THE KEY TO RECOVERY

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by Anna Margolina, Ph.D.

I break eye contact, abruptly exiting the realm of conversation. My mouth is wide open, but no word is coming out. As I struggle to produce a sound, I feel as if a dumb and blind force, oblivious to any reasoning, is pressing on my jaws, closing them, bringing them together. The world is frozen around me, and even though I know that my face is contorting into a horrible grimace, there is nothing I can do to stop it. For a few eternally long seconds, I am left alone, face to face with my personal monster – my stuttering.

### *THE BEGINNING*

According to my mother I started stuttering, when I was four. She believed it happened because some big dog frightened me. To me this was nonsense. I liked dogs. I never stuttered when talking to a dog. Humans were different.

No matter whether I was talking to close friends, to my family or to a total stranger, the monster was always there, gripping my throat every time I attempted to speak. I remember my speech as a constant struggle that consumed all my energy. And if in any situations I was more fluent, my memory didn't save those moments.

Fortunately, I grew up in the Soviet Union, where medicine was free and where an extensive therapy was available for those who stutter. I had plenty of speech therapy, learning various fluency techniques, such as breathing in a special way, preceding every cluster of words with a gentle exhalation, linking words in a sentence with a barely audible humming sound and pronouncing consonants very softly, with plenty of air.

The techniques were quite efficient in controlling blocking, but the downside was that they made my speech sound "different" and "not natural" (or at least I thought so). That was precisely what I was most afraid of. Besides, it didn't matter if I appeared fluent. While using these techniques, I felt in my heart that I still stuttered and was terrified that my horrible secret could be dragged into the open if my technique failed.

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No matter what I did, my monster was always there, lurking in the back of my mind, ready to pounce, making me feel small and helpless and inferior, different from fluently speaking people. No wonder that after a while, I would abandon the techniques, falling back in my habitual way of speaking. Inevitably, this would bring back my blocking and stuttering.

Another popular approach was assertiveness training, which included acting out different social situations and developing confidence and ability to stand your ground. In addition, I had hypnosis, acupuncture, and psychotherapy. At one occasion my father took me to see some wise village woman, who dripped melted wax on my head and muttered something under her breath for some length of time. I remember walking quietly beside him secretly hoping that when I opened my mouth, my speech would be fluent. But the first word that I said came out with a struggle, so no positive effect was produced.

Even though I kept relapsing after each course of therapy, over time my speech gradually improved, so when I grew up, I was more or less able to communicate my ideas. I still had my fears, but they weren't as frequent as when I was a child, and I was able to manage them to some extent with my fluency techniques.

## *OLD STRUGGLE AND NEW HOPE*

In 2001 my husband and I came to the U.S. And here, in a matter of a few months, my fluency deteriorated to the point that I was unable to say even a few words without heavy blocking. The reason was that, since my childhood, I firmly believed that clear and grammatically correct speech is an important sign of higher intelligence and education. This was an axiom. But now I spoke with a heavy Russian accent and was painfully aware of it. I knew my speech wasn't clear or correct anymore, that people barely understood what I was saying. Above all, my speech was different, and, therefore, unacceptable. This led to increased blocking, and increased blocking made my speech even more difficult to understand, which added stress and perpetuated the problem. This process was so deleterious to my self-esteem that all my confidence went down the drain together with my fragile fluency.

I decided to find a cure. First, I took several sessions of hypnosis and second, spent some money on a highly touted therapy course at the Handle Institute in Seattle, where I was taught various exercises to improve communication between my two cerebral hemispheres. Both approaches produced only minor effect.

"Disillusioned and frustrated, I gave up, and for the next several years, I did nothing to improve my stuttering. However, eventually I got so fed

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up with my inability to master an English accent that in 2009, I picked up the phone and dialed a number that I found in the local newspaper under the ad “Speech therapy. Accent reduction.” In my best voice, using all available fluency techniques, I said, “I would like to improve my accent.”

There was a long silence on the other end and then a female voice said, “Are you sure this is the only problem you want to work on?”

“Oh, yes,” I said. “I also stutter, but I know this is incurable. With the accent I still have hope.”

Somehow she convinced me to work with her on both problems. I was reluctant and uncertain, but I decided to give it one last try. I had no idea that by doing this I was taking a first step toward recovery.

## *VOLUNTARY STUTTERING*

Initially, it seemed that my feelings toward speech therapy were justified, because we started learning fluency techniques that were very similar to those that I had known since my childhood. Could it be that in four decades nothing changed in stuttering therapy?

Then one day my speech therapist asked me if I could stutter on purpose. This was definitely something new, and of course, it sounded very bizarre to me. However, on another day when I found myself locked in the most severe and prolonged block, I decided to give it a try. To my surprise, immediately after I intentionally tensed my muscles, the block was released and the next stretch of speech came out almost fluently.

This made me so curious that I decided to learn more about this technique and started gathering all available information concerning voluntary stuttering. In the course of this search, I stumbled across a very unusual book, *Redefining Stuttering*, written by John Harrison.

This was a book that turned my life around. According to it, all that I knew and believed about stuttering appeared to be wrong. It also appeared that all along I was trying to solve the wrong problem.

## *THE STUTTERING HEXAGON*

All my life, I have been fighting “my stuttering” – a “thing” that burdened me from childhood and belonged to me just as sure as the nose on my face. It was one of my characteristics, a part of my self-image, my scary monster. But according to John Harrison, stuttering can be eliminated, eradicated, or as he says “dissolved.” His own example was the best proof of this. To actually be free of stuttering? I buried this dream a long time ago. But his reasoning made so much sense that I started to wonder if my hopes should be resurrected.

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The most important thing that Harrison argues in his book is that stuttering is not some solid, one-piece pathological phenomenon – it is a system and should be addressed as such.

First of all, he suggested avoiding using the word “stuttering”, because he believed it obscures the real problem. Instead, he advised to talk about “blocking” or even “holding back”, focusing on all factors that evoked such reactions as tightening of vocal cords, clenching the jaws and other behaviors that were counterproductive to fluent speech.

According to Harrison this blocking behavior appears because of intertwined influences of our beliefs (such as “stuttering is unacceptable and should be avoided at all cost”), perceptions (“people judge my speech”), emotions (shame, anger etc), divided intentions (to speak or not to speak), and physiological components (such as susceptibility to stress, nervous excitability etc) Those six components - Behaviors, Beliefs, Perceptions, Intentions, Emotions and Physiological Reactions – can be represented as points on a Stuttering Hexagon, in which all points dynamically interact with and reinforce each other.

This was an entirely new approach. Instead of fighting stuttering as a single rock-solid phenomenon, Harrison suggested dismantling the stuttering system piece by piece. Another novel idea was that stuttering as such was only a part of the much broader problem that encompassed the experience of communication and my relation to other people and the surrounding world.

In some sense, I was cured from stuttering right on the spot, even before I started to apply the principles outlined in the book, because the problem that I had to “dissolve” wasn’t the same stuttering that I had dealt with before.

Although I still viewed it as “my monster,” now I could see that it was made up of diverse but quite manageable problems for which solutions already existed.

Of course, in practice it wasn’t that easy. Since my stuttering started rather early in my childhood, the tangled mess of non-productive social habits (such as avoidance of speaking situations), fears (fear of authority figures, speaking on the phone, speaking in public), limiting beliefs (“everybody thinks I am stupid,” “my speech is so tedious to listen to” etc.), and divided intentions (express or impress?) plus heightened emotional sensitivity became very difficult to untangle at my age of 40-plus.

Still, I was very willing to try and from that point on my battle with stuttering took an entirely new direction. I still attended speech therapy sessions, but the focus of my efforts had now shifted to activities outside of the speech therapy office. My therapist continued monitoring my

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progress with stuttering, and we kept working on my English, but the fluency techniques were abandoned entirely.

### *TOASTMASTERS – A VALUABLE RESOURCE*

Frankly, I don't know how far I would have gotten on my own, but one day, following a mad impulse, I emailed John Harrison and expressed my deep admiration for his book. The conversation followed, and at some point he agreed to coach me over Skype. I didn't expect him to "cure" me. In fact, I had no particular expectations and felt more like an explorer, who sails out in search of an unknown continent and is ready to take what comes to him. And after signing on with such an experienced guide, I started my explorations.

The first thing I did was to join a local Toastmasters Club and started applying the techniques of successful speaking that John included in his book. I would highly recommend to anyone who sets out to dismantle the stuttering system to find a place like Toastmasters. However, to make this experience less stressful and more enjoyable, you have to develop an individual plan and set up a realistic goal for every speech. There is no point to starting out by trying to measure up to the world's greatest orators. This approach will lead you to failure and frustration. Instead, you may focus on simple and realistic goals for each speech such as speaking in a bigger voice, or maintaining good eye contact even during blocking episodes, or you can even explore voluntary stuttering. The key is to choose only one goal, praise yourself on accomplishing it, and not worry about any flaws that you as a speaker might still have.

It is also important to make sure that any Toastmasters club that you select has a warm and supportive atmosphere. To prevent yourself from accidental hurts, it is better to disclose your speech problem during your introductory speech and explain your goal as a Toastmaster member.

I used public speaking exercises from John Harrison's book. For example, during my first speech I used elongated pauses and a slow pace. In my second speech I practiced using exaggerated gestures and maintaining eye contact, in the third, having a louder voice and varied pitch.

If I experienced a speech block during a presentation, I tried to remember not to push through it (as was my habitual way of dealing with blocks). Instead, I would intentionally prolong it, as if saying to my stuttering "Come on, buddy, let's see who gives up first." This voluntary stuttering technique produced an amazing effect of releasing tension, and, most important, emotional liberation. After a lifetime of futile attempts to blend in and be accepted, I gave myself wholehearted

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permission to be different. It felt so good.

## MAKING PROGRESS

Those deadlock blocks were the first to go. This was a significant victory for me, because for me the episodes of silent struggle were the most painful, since I had no control over them, and also because they were accompanied by weird facial contortions. I think if I continued to have those blocks, I would have quit Toastmasters after just one or two oral presentations because I wouldn't wish to subject myself to this humiliation anymore. But with major blocks out of the way and with my new bold and adventurous attitude I kept giving speeches and soon became known as one of the most active toastmasters in the district.

The most important thing was that I stopped getting frustrated over my failures. I stopped being afraid. In fact, I became so fascinated with my monster that I decided to befriend it. Since then, all the actions I've undertaken to facilitate my recovery have been driven, not only by my desire to overcome stuttering, but also out of scientific interest and deep curiosity.

## GETTING TO THE ROOTS

As my knowledge and confidence grew, so did my fluency. I also began to feel myself more and more in control of my speech. And yet, I felt that there was something else lurking underneath my blocking. Something that I couldn't quite identify but which had the feeling of helplessness, fear and inferiority as if I were suddenly reduced to some lower level of competency. In those moments I felt small and powerless, and I didn't know why. In those moments I didn't want to express myself or to connect with other people. I wanted to withdraw and hide.

The answer came with the book by Bob Bodenhamer, *Mastering Blocking and Stuttering*. Thanks to this book I made a startling discovery. It appeared that my belief system, with which I evaluated myself and my relationship with other people, was built on logical speculations and assumptions made by a child – a much younger me, a girl between the ages of four and eight.

This is why I was feeling so small. This is why I felt so inferior compared to other adults. And this is why I was so desperate to blend in, to be accepted and approved.

This was a revelation.

Lucky for me, there was a tool that I could use to fix this. The technique is called Neuro-Linguistic Programming or NLP, and it has been

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successfully used to treat a variety of conditions.

NLP is a form of cognitive therapy that gives people the power to revisit their past and re-evaluate it from a different perspective. This shift in perspective (called reframing) is what helps a person to arrive at a different conclusion. It is especially useful when applied to childhood experience, because we can use our mature brain, our adult knowledge and our life experience to correct the flawed logic of a small child.

Since Bob Bodenhamer was the first practitioner who started using NLP for stuttering and since I had read a fascinating story by Linda Rounds, who recovered from stuttering after having sessions with him, I decided to contact him. To my delight he agreed to several therapy sessions. In only five or six sessions we revisited my childhood, reviewed the foundation of my belief system, and replaced the faulty structure with one that was more sound and appropriate. I continued to have sessions beyond that and in total probably had about 10 to 12, but the biggest and most important change came from those first sessions.

It is interesting that all of the childhood episodes that we revisited and reframed during these sessions appeared so insignificant. It was hard to believe that they could lead to such a severe condition as stuttering. But as I understand now, they created a certain landscape, an environment, in which the stuttering monster felt right at home. After my mental landscape was changed, my speech started to flow much easier and much of the tension that accompanied speaking situations was gone for good. As I understand it now, changing my beliefs was the most difficult part in my "Hexagon therapy" and using NLP saved me many months or even years of effort, not mentioning a great deal of frustration that would inevitably accompany my attempts at battling my childhood fears on my own.

## *REDEFINING RECOVERY*

It took me a whole year of dedicated and consistent work to reach the point at which I was able to talk spontaneously, without fear or hesitation and with stuttering well out of my mind. It was not an easy year. I had to put aside many other activities to carve myself some time from my busy life. It took me another year to fine-tune my speech, and frankly, the work is still continues.

In addition to sessions with John Harrison and Bob Bodenhamer, I read everything that was somehow related to my problem. I read all the posts on the neurosemantics forum and contributed almost daily. I dutifully attended all Toastmasters meetings. I even enrolled in a clown school to become more comfortable before an audience and in a Shakespearean

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acting class – a big challenge for a non-native speaker of English.

In addition, I practiced my speaking skills with total strangers whenever I could, putting myself in more and more challenging situations. I learned to talk about my stuttering in an open and friendly manner, without feeling ashamed or inferior. All those efforts, though time consuming, were well worth it.

What I got from all this hard work was something that no therapy before could give me: freedom. I was free from the exhausting struggle that accompanied all my conversation before. I was liberated from fear and the feeling of inferiority. And most important, I was free from the kind of self-limiting beliefs that had previously hampered my achievements. I always believed that I shouldn't speak in public, because my speech was tedious and a pain to listen to. Toastmasters changed this belief. In 2011, I participated in the International Speech Competition in Toastmasters and won on two levels – the club and the area, as well as took second place in the third level – the division. I remember how one person from the audience came up to me after the competition and said, "This is the best speech I have heard in more than 10 years in Toastmasters."

In the same year, I did something that I also believed was impossible for me – I became second in command in my Toastmasters club, accepting the position of vice-president of education. In addition I was twice recognized as "an outstanding Toastmasters member."

I realized that I love speaking and in particular I greatly enjoy public speaking. With an old struggle long gone, I discovered that there is no speaking situation that scares me or that I would try to avoid. And this for me was far more precious than the artificial fluency that previously required me to monitor my breathing or produce the sounds in a special way and that threatened to evaporate the very moment I needed it most.

### *IS IT PERMANENT?*

After my speech crashed so suddenly in 2001 under pressure of speaking in a new language, I should have been always concerned whether or not my newly found fluency would hold. However this time I didn't have those fears. As soon as I realized that stuttering is not some permanently ingrained defect that I have no control over, but a system, all components of which are manageable, the possibility of relapse lost its doomsday flavor. In fact I had several relapses when I would suddenly find myself resuming blocking in some situations. Also I still find my fluency fluctuating to some degree depending on my emotional state.

For example, it is still difficult for me to maintain an emotionally charged conversation, especially when there is a risk of offending

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someone. I still feel a sting when I encounter an inattentive listener, the one who can interrupt in the mid-sentence and start talking about something else. I still have my moments. But I know what to do. I am able to recognize the signs that I have started slipping into the old mindset, and I can catch myself in time and get back on the fluent track.

Those episodes do not frighten me. I understand that it may be a while until my stuttering monster vacates the premises for good. But since it has been some time since I last engaged in a long silent struggle with it, I feel that it has lost all its power.

I feel that my stuttering, as I knew it, is gone.

My stuttering mindset is gone.

My fears and self-doubt are gone.

I know how to be fluent. It is actually very easy – just open your mouth and let the words flow.

There is no way I'll ever forget this.

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\* You can view Anna's Toastmaster speeches on her website at [www.amargolina.com/fluency](http://www.amargolina.com/fluency).

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## HOW THE HEXAGON TOOK THE SCARY OUT OF SPEECH

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by Ruth Mead

*"Do not weep. Do not wax indignant. Understand." Spinoza*

The driving force of my life has been the drive to understand. The need for further exploration has always haunted me and nothing frustrated me as much as being in the dark about something I not only *wanted* but *needed* to understand.

The fact that stuttering was a complete mystery for years is probably why it was so tough for me. Stuttering was like some lummoX barreling up behind me with a baseball bat and whomping me in the back of my head with all his strength. Each time it happened, I was as confused and surprised as the last time. Where was the logic? Was this a joke? How crazy was this? It just didn't make sense to me.

It was a long journey from "perplexing" to "understanding." I had already stopped stuttering for many years before things began to clarify. But what did I expect? Understanding is *always* in retrospect. The fact that I became fluent before I understood what was behind my stuttering taught me that understanding doesn't necessarily *precede* fluency; neither does understanding *cause* fluency.

My understanding came about by first experiencing stuttering and then *not*-stuttering, making my own observations, and then finding a book by the name of *Redefining Stuttering* by John Harrison, *naming* those experiences and elements....helping me to see all the different strands of my journey as one interrelated whole.

### *HOLDING BACK*

One of the first things Harrison suggested right from the get-go that made a difference in how I viewed stuttering was to substitute "hold back" for "stutter" whenever I spoke about stuttering. This was helpful in seeing what was actually going on. "Holding back" implied there was a purpose for the blocks I had experienced. It also implied personal responsibility, something I do. I was already in the process of under-

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standing stuttering in a different way than my initial view of blocks coming from the bat of a bully, over which I had no control.

So when I speak about stuttering in this chapter, I understand that “stutter” is a word with different meanings. After suggesting that “holding back” is a better way to understand what happens when we stutter, Harrison writes: “Constantly making it (stuttering) sound like a unitary ‘thing’ helps to give it a tangible reality which in turn helps it to misrepresent what is really going on. Even substituting ‘block’ is better since it implies that there is something being blocked.”

### *THE INTER-CONNECTEDNESS OF ALL THINGS*

John Harrison wrote: “Stuttering is really the product of a constellation of problems, including difficulties with self-assertion, a confused self-image, a reluctance to express what you feel, bad speech mechanics and so forth.”

There were some things I understood about the inter-connectedness of things (even though I was still unable to connect what I understood about life in general to stuttering.) I was aware of how everything in other areas of my life affected other areas. Eventually I understood that nearly everything that happened in my life affected my stuttering in one way or another.

If I had a conversation with a fixer-upper type of person, the type of person who picked lint off my shoulders and brushed imaginary dandruff off my collar, I stuttered more.

If I thought about stuttering or obsessed about it, even when I was simply trying to fix my speech, I stuttered more. If I was too busy to think at all, I stuttered less.

When I felt like a “Before” in a room of “Afters,” I stuttered more. When I was around friends, I stuttered less.

If I talked to the tick-tock of a metronome and then tried to carry the technique over to my classroom, the new way of talking got into a fist fight with my natural mind (“What are you trying to do? Prove to everyone you are a robot? Well....that’s what you sound like....a stupid robot. Go back to stuttering. It sounds a *lot* better than *that*.”) And then I had *two* things in my head fighting like two pigs in a gunnysack, and I stuttered more.

My emotions affected my stuttering. Feeling inferior affected my stuttering. Being around critical people affected my stuttering. Trying to fix myself affected my stuttering. Obsessing about stuttering made stuttering infinitely worse. So everything affected my stuttering. Succeed-

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ing at something affected my feelings and this generally meant I stuttered less.

This understanding of the constant interaction of all factors in my life began in an unusual way, through a seemingly silly event that yielded hugely significant insights into what was happening to my speech. When this event happened I was fortunately doing pages and pages of free-writing each day, so I wrote about this event (as I did nearly everything else that was going on in my life at that time.)

## ***BIG RED BLOTCHES***

I went with a few girlfriends to a “makeup party” where they did makeovers, using a well-known beauty product. When they asked for volunteers, my hand shot up, because I wanted to see what this much-heralded makeup could do for my skin. So hey, that’s great...there were 10 chairs in a row and I sat down near the end. I was excited to see the results of this product that was being advertised all over Dallas.

First, the lady who was making the presentation told us about the amazing properties of the makeup, assuring us it would make our skin “smooth, polished, and supple.” I felt a “nudge” at this point...like “something’s wrong here” ...and the image of a leather saddle hanging in a relative’s barn flashed through my mind.

I watched while my friends were being made up and I was really impressed. Finally it was my time. The lady representing the product applied the makeup on my face, and it really was yummy looking. My skin looked creamy and took on a beautiful radiant glow.

The presenter was delighted. As she proceeded to finish the remaining makeovers, I sat around with my friends watching what was going on, all of us impressed with the huge improvement this product seemed to make. I went into the kitchen, got the coffee pot and was pouring coffee for everyone when I heard squeals: “Look! Look at your face!” I ran to the bathroom and was horrified...the image in the mirror looking back at me was shocking. Unlike the others, I had reacted to the product, and big red blistery bumps were coming out on my face.

At that point I remembered the “nudge” I felt when I first heard the presenter use the words “smooth, polished and supple” which my mind automatically connected with products used for leather saddles. I immediately bombarded the sales person with questions about the ingredients, etc. She opened her briefcase and pulled out literature written by the architect of the skin products and read it aloud to all of us.

The friend who was hosting the party got out her leather polish and all of us were shocked that some of the ingredients in the makeup were

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similar to the leather polish.

I went home from the party and wrote: *"It is strange that one person's worldview can produce a formula, the formula becomes a product, and the product can end up as big red blotches on my face."* It was amazing to me how interconnected everything was.

This view of skin as: "Something that needs to be kept smooth and supple" was carried out by formulating a product with ingredients that would supposedly polish, shine, smooth and protect skin. This way of looking at skin was carried out by "how-to" to produce a visible product. The product when applied to my face produced both emotional (Yikes!) and physiological changes (big red blotches). As simple as it may sound now, this inter-connectedness didn't seem simple to me at the time.

### *TREATING THE SYMPTOM*

One similarity between stuttering and the big red blotches was that just as the doctor treated only the symptoms (my big red blotches) by giving me a little tube of cream that didn't work, for years I had only dealt with the symptoms I experienced when I spoke: severe blocking and holding back. I was beginning to understand at this time that stuttering is only the visible symptom of something deeper (like my big red blotches were) but I was not looking into the complexity of what this might be. Just as the doctor treated the symptoms and probably never wondered about it again, so I was dealing only with my blocking and holding back, without looking at the whole story surrounding this blocking.

I am old enough to remember Abraham Maslow and all the "greats" of the self-actualizing movement, and I realized that Maslow was correct...if you want a "starting point", a "point zero" for what appear to be isolated problems, look to your worldview...the way you are looking at the world. Abraham Maslow's teachings made it possible for me to look at something as seemingly isolated as face cream and know that if you keep going back and back and back, what you will arrive at is the creator's (or architect's) worldview. If it is wrong, the product will either not work for the long haul or will be harmful. This part seemed very clear to me.

When Maslow spoke about worldview, he was not referring to the way I was looking at myself or my own personality, but how I was looking at the world. He believed we are the ones who *look* at the world; we are not the *objects* of our looking. So when he said "worldview" he wasn't referring to self-esteem or self-confidence (no matter how important those factors are.) He was talking about how realistically we are

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looking at the world.

So I carried this over, for the first time, to my understanding of stuttering. Was it possible that my worldview was at the bottom of stuttering? Was stuttering possibly a *by-product* of a complex interactive system just as asphalt is a by-product of oil refining here in Texas? If holding back was a by-product of another conflict in my life, then trying to control stuttering was like trying to control the big red blotches.

## STARTING WITH NATURE

Nature is like a river. This river runs through me. Speech is part of this spontaneous flowing river. This river part of me (my spontaneous, original, flowing unconscious/subconscious intelligence) flows in the path of least resistance. There is another part of me that I refer to as “resistance to that flow”. We call this “the conscious mind or conscious intention or will or conscious thought/beliefs/imagination.”

The reason the mind is in conflict with nature is because of something called “inherited conditioned responses.” This inherited mental conditioning is like the brake system on a car. It resists natural easy-breezy spontaneity because the intellect looks down on all that is native or natural. We all inherit this mental conditioning and pass it on from generation to generation until we turn the light of our big intelligence on our beliefs, values and attitudes.

When I stuttered this conflict between flow and resistance to that flow became obvious. I think of flow as the river and resistance as the dam we, ourselves, build across the river, preventing its flow. What began as a mere view of how speech happens (“Speech is manufactured by my conscious mind”) led me to what seemed like “logical” beliefs: “Since speech is produced by conscious intention, therefore I must think about every word I say, every breath I take, as well as plan what I am going to say and how I am going to say it.”

Those beliefs, in turn, produced certain behaviors (the more I thought about speech, the more I stuttered.) And the more I stuttered the more it affected my emotions: helpless, frantic, and “copeless,” (“Copeless” was Dr. Wendell Johnson’s word that reflected my feelings very well.)

As my emotions became locked into the fear-mode, this also affected the way I felt about myself and the way I felt about myself affected my personality (as I became more and more fixated on conscious intention...constantly willing myself to speak.) Nothing kills the personality like being controlled by one’s own critical censoring mind. And of course, spontaneity and conscious effort work in inverse proportion: the more effort expended on speaking, the less spontaneous I became.

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In other words, when my mind exerted control over what was meant to be “the spontaneous act of speaking” I ended up disrupting the speaking process and this disruption left me feeling afraid of future speech. Attempting to control speech consciously was the primary culprit because control disrupted flowing spontaneous speech.

### *EMOTION: THE CHICKEN OR THE EGG*

The question at one time when it came to stuttering was “Which came first the stuttering or the emotion?” Or “Which comes first, a persistent fear of one or more unfamiliar social situations...or stuttering?”

It didn’t matter to me which came first. I only knew there was a connection between stuttering and fear...both fear of speaking and fear of academic or social situations where I would have to speak. But there was something else I learned from Maslow: namely, fear is a reaction. Feelings are reactions: sometimes reactions to events, sometimes to behavior, sometimes to beliefs, values or attitudes. All I can tell you is that once I stuttered horribly and now I don’t...and along with the stuttering went the fear.

I knew that just as my emotions in the makeup incident were reactions to the big red blotches (Yikes! Ugly! Terrible!), this was what was happening when I stuttered...fear and helplessness was a reaction to something and that something was the behavior we call stuttering. Stuttering always preceded my fear of stuttering and my worldview always preceded my stuttering but those elements also seemed to affect everything else in my life. This led me to believe if the stuttering went away (regardless of the cause of stuttering) so would the fear of stuttering (this turned out to be true).

But I couldn’t will stuttering away. My mind was unable to control it. I had to understand how blocking was related to everything else going on. Was it possible that holding back was a by-product of my beliefs about what I had to do to improve speaking? Was holding back a by-product of my will taking over an activity that was meant to be both spontaneous and automatic?

About this time I heard Krishnamurti speak. He said something like this: Is it possible for you to get rid of fear right this moment? Not to deny it or resist it or lie about being afraid or pretend not to be afraid? This is our job tonight to get rid of fear, and if we can’t do it, our meeting is worthless. Then he connected everything about how fear would not exist without thought and to understand thought you must separate thought from observation. So even fear was connected to ev-

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everything else.

### *PARALYSIS BY ANALYSIS*

My blocking was like paralysis: Paralysis by analysis. When I tried to analyze what was happening when I spoke, I blocked. When I attempted to fix the way I spoke, I blocked. When speech was viewed by me as a performance, I held back. (I wasn't conscious that I viewed speaking as a performance, I *acted as if* speech was a performance.)

I was finding something else that messed with my stuttering: Whenever the relationship between intuitive spontaneous expressive Big Me and intellectual judgmental Little Me was out of sync, I blocked worse. When I was speaking and suddenly my intellect would "take over" and critique what I was saying, I lost my enthusiasm for what I was saying. This led me to believe that my spontaneous flow decreased as my resistant intellect increased. How did this all fit together?

I didn't know, but I intended to find out.

### *CONNECT, CONNECT, CONNECT*

Buckminster Fuller used to say "Thinking isolates events and understanding interconnects them. Understanding is structure" he declared, "for it means establishing the relationship between events."

One day I wrote out some of the things I had observed about how some elements of speaking related to other elements. I had been taught that I could fix stuttering through certain conscious mind techniques so I somehow assumed that speech is a product of my conscious mind. Certain beliefs about speech followed logically: I need to think about speaking. I need to make Herculean efforts to breathe correctly, plan my words, practice. I held back until my censor approved of what I said. Speech was hard, but I had hope in this: the harder I tried the better I thought I would speak.

Action followed: I tried, pushed, forced words through clenched muscles. I froze up. No words came out no matter how hard I pushed.

I was embarrassed by this freeze-up. I was frantic, confused. I felt all kinds of turmoil going on in my body: my heart raced, my face felt hot, I had the urge to run. My body responded by holding back because no matter what I said, my inner critic would reject it.

I keep repeating this behavior, stuttering, freezing up, being embarrassed. My conscious mind then took over more aggressively, trying harder and harder to break through the blocks it created. My conscious intention (will) became more entrenched. Confusion reigned. I felt dis-



appointed: I believed my conscious will could accomplish this task and yet it failed me every time.

When my mind exerted control over the spontaneous act of speaking I actually *disrupted* the speaking process and this disruption left me feeling afraid of future performances, frustrated, panicked and helpless. Fear then caused me to hold back and block even more. It seemed like a vicious circle.

### *THE EFFECT OF THINKING ON MY SPEECH*

If you have ever driven a stick shift, do you remember how everything would be flowing together really terrifically and then you'd get to the top of a steep hill with a bunch of cars behind you and you'd go "wow, what am I going to do" and you'd start frantically thinking and planning what you were going to do and thinking messed up the sync that was going on? That is basically what used to happen when I spoke.

There are people who say "Well you are thinking about it too much so we have to practice not thinking about every move." Of course you know this is foolish because the more you think about not thinking, the more thinking you do. "Take no thought when you speak" implies that conscious control is not part of the loop. When you are in sync, your body instinctively, without thought, acts on the promptings of this subliminal hidden intelligence.

### *HARRISON'S HEXAGON*

I had a lot of foggy notions about stuttering I had gained from careful observation of my own stuttering and other PWS in Munich. I had also been through many years of speech therapy both in the USA and Germany.

I had taken to free-writing for hours on end, and after a few months of writing the "river" (how I refer to my spontaneous flow), my stuttering went away. Eventually, I wanted to understand what happened.

Enter John Harrison's book *Redefining Stuttering*. In this book Harrison made it clear that stuttering is not caused by one thing but is due to intertwined influences. To explain his theory he constructed a hexagon, labeling each of the six sides with a term or label.

These six terms, one for each side of the hexagon, were:

- Perception
  - Beliefs
  - Behavior
  - Emotion
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- Physiological Response
- Intention.

When I reached this part of the book a big red “Achtung!” flashed in my mind, and I jumped to attention.

### *A HELEN KELLER MOMENT*

Do you remember the story of blind Helen Keller when her teacher pumped water over her hands as she helped Helen to form the word “water” with her mouth? She did this over and over and over, heroically attempting to connect the *reality* of the water with the *word* “water”? And remember how that simple connection became the great turning point for her? Harrison’s Hexagon was a similar revelation for me. All the things I had been observing for myself in my own experience suddenly had names and the names made sense.

It is worth noting that Harrison didn’t list six techniques, or six theories. He listed six elements with which I was well-acquainted. The interconnections I had been noticing now started to make sense, simply because Harrison was able to *name* those elements. Wow, I kept thinking, *this* is now familiar landscape. Foggy outlines began to shift-shape into recognizable terrain. Oh, look! *Now* I’m in familiar territory...now I’m finding my way around. I felt like I was home.

What I referred to as “vision” or “worldview” or “the way I am looking at things” was similar to what Harrison referred to as “*Perception.*”

My logic took clusters of thoughts and made beliefs out of them that attempted to explain things. Many of these explanations were wrong. I created certain ways in which my will could improve the mechanical aspects of my speech and these ideas were similar to Harrison’s “*Belief.*”

When I carried out these beliefs into action (making great efforts to breathe correctly, plan my words and practice speaking) and this conscious effort resulted in hesitating, blocking and holding back, Harrison might have used the word “*Behavior.*”

When I reacted to this behavior with embarrassment, or when my writing cleared away emotional residue and unblocked frozen energy, his word “*Emotion*” fit the bill.

When I intended to speak fluently but failed or when my energy split between following my natural tendencies and following conscious intention, he might have used the word “*Intention.*”

And when my heart raced and my face turned red in response to behavior or emotion, Harrison’s term might have been “*Physiological Response.*”

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I could see how my emotions then affected my behavior and how my physiological responses affected my intention, as well as how my beliefs affected my behavior and my behavior affected my emotions...all elements maintaining dynamic interaction and reinforcing each other. When my feelings about myself improved, my stuttering improved. When my beliefs changed, my behavior changed. Intuition put me in touch with my deepest feelings and perceptions. Everything depended on everything else.

### *THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF THINKING*

Years before I heard of the Hexagon when I was stuttering worse than ever, I was very involved in a movement called "Positive Thinking. I was really into it. People sometimes consider positive thinking as "new-agey" or linked in some way to law-of-attraction, but at that time positive thinking was the big fad. I couldn't see any connection whatsoever with my worsening speech and something as "positive" as my new way of thinking.

The next time I went home to see my parents, I mentioned positive thinking to my dad. My dad who counseled depressed people pooh-poohed the whole idea of positive thinking, reminding me that not one severely depressed person ever came to him without a copy of "The Power of Positive Thinking" either tucked securely in his armpit or on the tip of his tongue. My dad even spoke derisively of the author of the book, referring to him as "Normy Vincent Peale."

I told my dad that I wanted to be positive above all else. He said, "Well, good luck. The danger is that pretty soon you will water down everything you see and everything you say and you will lose sight of what is true and real."

And I said to my dignified intelligent father: "Don't be so negative. There's no such thing as 'it doesn't work.' All it means is 'it doesn't work for *you*.'"

My father reminded me: "If it doesn't work, it doesn't work. Period. If *you* can't swim as long as you are holding onto the side of the swimming pool, it means *Junior Lindberg* can't swim if he is holding onto the side of the pool.

My dad equated positive thinking with "whistling past the graveyard." When I said "I don't want to hear negative things," he assured me that judging reality as negative meant I would have to give up my intuition. When I asked why, he answered (reminding me of intuitions that kept me out of danger more than once), that intuition, especially intuitive warnings, are often "negative."

He told me that positive thinking is still thinking and 'positive' is just

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a label. He said "It's not up to you to judge reality as either positive or negative. The question you *can* answer is 'is this true?'"

When I questioned my dad as to how I would know if something was true or not, he (being a Pragmatist) answered: "Does it work? That's the way you know. If it's true that you can swim while still hanging onto the side of the pool, then it will work (you will be able to swim while still holding onto the side of the pool.)"

He continued: "And you know how obsessive thinking *always* throws a monkey wrench into the flow of things?" (He knew how well I realized *that*.) "Well, that's just not 'now and then'. That's *always*." He didn't want to rub it in...the fact that obsessive thinking about speech always made me stutter worse (a fact I had explained to him many times) because he was pretty careful never to bring up the subject of stuttering unless I first initiated it.

One comment from my dad was: "If you ever want to find your way through any problem, it is important to report to yourself *what is really going on* at any moment and not selectively pick and choose what you report to yourself." He told me that my unbiased perception of reality was absolutely necessary input if I ever hoped to find my way through the difficulties I was facing.

## *THE EFFECTS OF BELIEF ON HOLDING BACK*

It was my father's opinion that the censorship I experienced in my major relationship at the time had become *self*-censorship and this was definitely messing with my spontaneity and causing me to hold back. My parents both noticed that stuttering was taking its toll. I would start a conversation filled with energy and excitement and within a few seconds or minutes I would stop mid-sentence and just never bother to finish my sentences. My friends repeated many times over: "Finish your sentence. What were you going to say?"

Even when I *wrote* about what was going on with my speech, my sentences would stop midstream. Since I have this holding-back down in black and white, you might be interested in the conflict that went on in my mind during that time. Here are some of the notes I wrote after the "big red blotches" event:

"Wow! Who in their right mind would put harsh chemicals into face cream? That lady must be crazy!"

"Now, don't be so harsh. She's actually a very nice lady. People have great respect for her."

"But this cream wasn't made for living skin; it was made to be used on dead leather."

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"Well, you notice the other girls didn't have reactions."

"What is *that* supposed to mean?"

"Don't be so negative. Don't judge. We all have a right to our own opinions."

"We may have a right to our own opinions. We *don't* have a right to our own *facts*."

"There you go again. Who are *you* to say she is wrong? Stop being so negative. Stop judging people."

"You know what I wish? I wish you would get on my side. You always tell *me* not to judge...but you are judging me for judging. I need you to listen to me without constantly criticizing me...I need you to get on my side. I get so, so tired of..."

And then, mid-sentence, the writing broke off.

So once again I was experiencing the effects of censoring beliefs on my own holding back (whether the holding back occurred in speaking or writing.)

## *POLICING PERCEPTIONS*

So when my parents mentioned self-censorship, a little bell went off in my head. For several years (the same years that my stuttering went completely off-the-chart) I had been policing my own perceptions and responses with judgments regarding what I said or how I looked at things (isn't it somewhat astonishing that I called this censorship "positive thinking?") And the more I censored myself, the more I blocked, stuttered, spluttered, held back.

It was like my critical mind was ganging up against my own intuitive knowing and common sense. I who had always insisted on "say it like you mean it" didn't really care what I meant anymore. I just wanted to spit any necessary words out and run the hell away from it all. What I was running away from was the control of my vastly inferior bossy conscious mind.

I instinctively knew what to say and how to say it without thinking about it. I knew what I meant (starting out strong and full of meaning) but my Censor watered everything down, condemned me, intimidated me, and a tired washed-out feeling took over, accompanied by the guilty feeling that I had no right to an opinion...and if I *did* have a right to an opinion, I certainly had no right to *express* that opinion.

It was as if my intellect stepped right into the middle of a sentence, held up a hand (like a crossing guard at a school crossing) and said "whoa, stop, back up", and this stopped me from making any definitive statements at *all*.

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## *PESKY BELIEFS*

As I backed out of the driveway of my parent's home I told them that one of the well-intentioned Positive Thinking gurus had inadvertently messed with my speech with her belief that before we made any statement at all about *anything* we should think carefully about each word we say, sending our words through three gates. The three gates were 1) Is it positive? 2) Is it necessary? And 3) is it kind? By the time anything I had to say got through all three gates I was stuttering so badly it didn't matter anymore. My mom was still laughing when I waved good-bye.

## *BLOWING A GASKET*

John Harrison suggested in *Redefining Stuttering* that people who stutter often have a difficult time getting angry. This was absolutely true for me.

I was bothered by people being angry with each other even at a very young age. My mother told me that when I was around four years old, she and my father were arguing and I scooted a chair across the room, smack between my parents, got up on the chair, took my mother's hand and held it together with my dad's hand without saying a word. That pretty much ended their argument.

It occurred to me once or twice that I didn't know myself. Once we were asked certain question in a discussion group so we could all get to know each other. One of the questions was "what is your favorite color?" I looked around the room thinking "What is wrong with me? I have no favorites. Everyone else in the room knows what he or she likes but me. I like green for grass but I wouldn't like it for the sky." But the guy sitting next to me jumped to his feet with "My favorite color is blue. Blue is the only color I like." So I was next and I said "green" because that was the easiest word for me to say without stuttering, and I was stuck with green. I was continually handed green ribbons and green notebooks and green pencils because, after all, "that is your favorite color."

Even though I didn't know my favorite color or favorite movie or favorite anything, in many ways I was realistic about myself. When asked to lead discussions I said "No, I stutter." Those who asked me stood back horrified, mumbling "don't run yourself down" or "we didn't even notice that you stutter" (like I wasn't supposed to know or admit that I stuttered.) My response was "I'm pretty smart and sometimes I'm pretty funny, and I get along with people. *But I still stutter.*" It was unheard of for a person who stuttered to admit he/she stuttered.

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## *IS STUTTERING A CONTROL ISSUE?*

The first hint that my blocking and holding back was a control issue happened when I was 13 years old and a speech therapist asked my mother if anyone in our family was controlling. No one talked about “control freaks” at that time and besides, it was considered a good trait when one person in the family bossed everyone else around. The word “organized” often came up, or even “managerial.” But never the word “controlling.” So my mother looked at my therapist silently, her gray eyes peering over her glasses and answered in her always-polite sweetness: “Well, no, Dear, I don’t believe anyone in our family is controlling.”

Later that evening I heard my mother tell my dad what happened. When she got to: “I don’t believe anyone in our family is controlling” my dad stopped her. “Didn’t you hear what went on this morning before she went to school?” he asked. No, she didn’t remember. So he proceeded to tell how I had taken a walk before school that Spring morning and then sat on the porch swing for a split second when he heard my sister, seeing how delighted I was, scream “Look! She’s out there! Sitting in the swing! She shouldn’t go outdoors before school.”

It didn’t occur to me to wonder why she should even have an opinion about what I did with my time. My life was about “live and let live” and I wasn’t going to allow anyone to bug my happiness.

## *STUTTERING WAS LIKE A BURKA*

I’ve heard many PWS state that stuttering didn’t bother them excessively. You can leave my name off that list. Having to live with stuttering, for me, was like living my life under a burka. What are you going to do if you have to wear a burka everywhere you go? It will control and limit everything you do. How about a swim? Oh wait, I can’t swim with my burka. Okay, how about a walk on the beach. Hey, great. Oh wait, what’s the point of walking on the beach under my burka? Okay, then why not ride a bike? Oh sure! I love to ride my bike. Oh wait, no, my burka would obviously get tangled in the chain.

Everything, for me, was affected by stuttering. Remember that hilarious story? I *love* that story. Oh wait, I better hadn’t tell that one. I’d get stuck on the punch line.

Your friends are talking about Elvis Presley and even though your parents lived across the street from Elvis and your mother walked his dog every day...no, no, better keep that under your hat. You would get stuck on the word Elvis for at least two minutes while everyone suddenly looked shoe-ward. And there’s nothing you can easily substitute for

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the word “Elvis.” You can’t say “the guy with the blue suede shoes” or everyone would suddenly need to clear their throats...all together now....

Or how about this...how about when they needed a great idea at work last week and you thought up a real doozy, but you mumbled so softly no one heard your insightful profundity except the guy who sits next to you (in order to capitalize on your depth), then brazenly swaggers to the front of the group and describes your ideas as if they are his own. Oh wait! I forgot! He’s no longer with us...he was promoted last month to upper management.

I knew a guy who secretly worshipped a girl for two years but couldn’t get a single word out of his mouth after he said “h-h-h-h-hello”...and then...see that guy over there...yeah, *that’s* the guy, the back-slapping dork with the slicked-back “doo.” Well, just as my friend had worked up the nerve to ask the girl out after two years, Slick cut in on him and asked her out to “Phantom of the Opera” and when my friend found out about it, he promptly left work, tore home, jumped in bed, pulled the covers over his head and literally *grieved* for hours.

I had experienced limitations all my life. And if its okay with you, I’m going to assume that maybe one of the main reasons I was as tolerant as I was had to do with having to meet the challenges faced by all people who stutter as severely as I did.

## *RIDICULOUS TOLERANCE*

Tolerance isn’t always a desirable trait. An example of an overabundance of tolerance was an event that neighbors remember (when I was around 28 years old). All four children were small. One evening a lady who had moved to our small town from East Germany decided to pay me a visit. This lady had been waiting her turn at the barber shop when I was there with my kids. My neighbor told me after I left the barber shop the barber said (about me)...“That is the town clown.” Since this tiny lady delighted in depressing people, who better to hit on than a happy person? You can’t depress a depressed person, right? But a Happy Hannah? Sure, she might give *that* a try. Anyway, that same day at around 7 p.m. she knocked on our door.

We had eaten dinner, and I had baked a huge pan of cinnamon rolls (the sinfully rich kind full of butter and cinnamon with brown sugar caramel frosting a half inch thick poured over the top), and I had it on top of the oven cooling for breakfast the next morning.

So this lady, by the name of Charlotte, sat down and began to talk about her life in the “old country” and how her husband died and even about a run-in she had with the school principal in that town that very

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day. The principal had informed her that her daughter was extremely messy and slovenly in her homework and didn't turn it in, to which Charlotte replied (she told me): "I will have you know that Annie is *very* thorough. She washes her important places very thoroughly every day before she goes to school."

So I knew what I was dealing with quite early in the evening. Then she proceeded to tell me about her husband who was buried in the town cemetery. "I tell my shil-dren: 'Shil-dren, I say, it is goot Helmut is dead. Now we know where he is.'" A few minutes later she added "You know, Roooooot, no flowers grow mit Helmut? No flowers. No! And I say... I say 'Charlotte, maybe no flowers grow since Helmut is *bad* man, no?'" To drive home the connection she was making, she kept repeating "no grass grow...bad man...bad, bad man."

So I had no illusions that I was speaking with a sane person, but there I sat as the hours ticked by: 8 o'clock, then 9, then midnight, then 2 a.m., then 4. When she first arrived and I offered her a cinnamon roll, she refused. But soon she asked for a plate and scooted off three rolls on a dinner plate, asked for a fork and got to work. By the time she had socked down the whole pan of cinnamon rolls, it was 4 a.m., and I was still sitting there, watching what was going on, never even *suggesting* that maybe it would be better if she went home since I had to get the kids off to school in a few hours. It didn't even occur to me that she was a control freak, using my energy, time and food.

Finally I said "let me drive you home" and she said "well, it's almost morning. I could just stay and eat breakfast with your family." But I went downstairs to the garage, backed out the car and to my credit, I took her home. One neighbor saw me driving at around 5 a.m. that morning with Charlotte by my side so as soon as the kids left for school in the morning, my neighbors wanted to hear the story. When I told them, they did not laugh. They didn't see the humor in it at *all*. They said things like "What is *wrong* with you, Girl?" or "Anyone in their right mind would get mad as a hornet at that lady." Or "What in the hell happened to your brain?"

I learned from that experience and many others that it is okay to ask Harold Snodgrass to go home after 8 hours...and that's a step in the right direction.

## *HOLDING BACK EMOTION*

I knew people who stammered in Munich, all of them men, and without exception these were people who couldn't get angry. One guy was a scientist married to a tiny little woman who carried a big stick. In spite of

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the fact that she spent her days at a beauty salon/spa and never, not once in her life, held a job, she spent her days “budgeting” their income. The most humiliating thing she did was to put her husband on an extremely limited allowance, like a small child, and required him to ask her whenever he needed to spend a few cents over his allowance. So we all shared our stories in our PWS meetings and it made for some great comedy.

One evening I was asked by the group why I thought I had never been angry in my life, and I told them I thought it was because I had put up with so many limitations, along with goofy therapies that it had served as an inoculation against anger. I was probably even a little proud of myself, thinking of myself as a “good sport” or other flattering names. One evening I said, “When I get mad, I’m not going to use the word ‘mad’. I will use the term ‘righteous indignation.’ Mad is bad, but righteous indignation is a beautiful term, reminding me of God on Mount Sinai, delivering an ultimatum to the people below.”

A few months before I got really angry, I had been to a family reunion and had blown up at the sister who reported on my “whereabouts” earlier. The blowup in this instance wasn’t really terrible, it was just shocking to me. I was 31 years old and had never been angry in my life. I just couldn’t get it. What was wrong with me? It never occurred to me to even question whether or not I was justified in getting angry. In my mind, there was no excuse whatsoever for losing my cool.

After this, I returned home to Munich, and I also returned to the speech therapy I was involved with in Munich. This therapist may have succeeded at controlling her students but it seemed to me she had done so only at a stunning cost both to her own intelligence and personality. Frau Weber (pronounced Vay-burr) spoke broken English laced with guttural German and had some pretty weird ideas about how to stop stuttering.

I took this therapy with a German man by the name of Hans, another PWS who claimed he had never been angry in his life. When Frau Weber went to refill her water class, we would talk. We would laugh about what might be wrong with us that we couldn’t get angry. He told me about several friends of his who stuttered who had never been angry either.

Anyway, when class resumed, there we both stood, breathing in, breathing out, listening patiently to the therapist tell us for the umpteenth time that stuttering was caused by shallow breathing and if she could simply get us to breathe deeply (“diaphragmatic breathing” was what it was referred to at that time), maybe we wouldn’t stutter so much (even though she didn’t believe in the word “cure.”)

And then she monologued. She began her diatribes with statements like “Stuttering is very destructive...very *bad*, *yah?*”

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I knew what would happen if I agreed with her but Hans never seemed to catch on. Hans made the mistake of nodding his head.

At that point, the Frau turned to Hans. "Then Vhat? Vhat?????" (implying by this question that Hans wouldn't stutter if he didn't get something from stuttering. She had made it clear on numerous occasions that people who stutter do so in order to manipulate people or "work the public.")

Hans always looked as if he had just awakened from a bad nightmare. Hans ignored Frau Weber, quickly gathered his belongings, calmly remarked that he forgot to turn the stove off in his home...and left. This left me alone with Frau Weber.

And then the badgering began again. "You, Roooot, you had a bad shildhood?" I told her no, I did not. When she ridiculed American's tendency to potty train children early (a claim of hers unsubstantiated by fact), I was tempted to lie to her, tempted to tell her I wore diapers until I was two years old, but I kept breathing out, breathing in, breathing out, breathing in....

I had learned I could read aloud to myself for hours on end if I knew no one was in the room with me, so I wanted to ask a question as to why this was so. Especially since I used the same breathing mechanism in the same way both when I stuttered and when I didn't. So I stopped the breathing exercise for a moment and said calmly "I wonder if I could ask you a question?"

"We are in the middle of learning something new" Frau Weber said.

"This isn't exactly new for me" I answered.

"This is teaching moment. We have time later for talking moment," she assured me. (She always answered questions, telegram style).

"Uh, maybe we could have an *understanding* moment now and then" I said, my voice still calm.

"You need to work on breathing," the Frau answered.

"Why?" I asked.

"Because breathing incorrectly is cause of stuttering."

"I know that's what you *believe*," I answered.

"I don't *believe* this. I *know* it."

"So you are telling me that when I am speaking I am supposed to constantly interrupt what I'm saying with the thought 'Now, take a deep breath'?"

"Deep breath mit *diaphragm*," she corrected.

"Okay, Okay, but when I think about breathing, I stutter more," I explained simply.

"You should not be in class if you don't believe in techniques we offer, Miss Roooot."

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Suddenly I didn't care. I didn't care about being nice. I was tired of listening to her, tired of her rudeness, tired of stuff she was handing out that in no way matched my own observations or experiences.

I was still breathing in, breathing out, when BOOM. I couldn't hold it in anymore. My voice was shaky now...."Soooooooooooo.....well, all I can say is it must be pretty nice to know for sure what the cause and cure of stuttering is." I try to get the shakes out of my voice.

"Experts know for 10 years now, Root" Frau Weber assured me.

That did it. My voice was still shaking like crazy, but I didn't care: "Do you know what you educators do?" I screech. "You teach people like me to distrust our own impulses, reject our own observations. You order me not to ask questions or won't answer them if I ask. Well, I'm *mad as hell* and I'm not taking it anymore."

(I could see my face in those little 12-inch square mirror tiles with nasty little gold flecks in them across the room, and it wasn't a pretty sight.) In the mirror, I saw a 30-something woman with wild auburn hair and a bright red face. I would never have known as I listened to the furious woman in the mirror that she had ever stuttered in her life.

Frau Weber's watery blue eyes were huge behind her turquoise-rimmed glasses. She had been looking at a calendar all the time I was screaming, and then she said something to the effect: "You were born to be a great force in the world," and I was pretty sure she had read that sentiment off the inspirational calendar she had been ogling.

"But that force is not *controllable*," I yelled. "I'm *tired* of not saying what I see! The more I think about how to speak or how to breathe, the more conflicted I am and the worse I stutter. It's *thought* that messes me up..."

"It would be best for you to leave. Leave and don't come back. Gertrude will have your bill ready."

## *THE RELIEF OF EXPRESSION*

When I paid my bill and walked out into the balmy evening on Karlsplatz, I felt free...free and happy and energetic. It was like another self had taken over at the point I hit rock bottom...and even more, it was as if I *loved* the intensity and flow of this self over which I obviously had no control. When I hear people talk about how the spirit breathes them, I now understand what they mean. All I know is that I didn't first "think" and then "speak." This inner flow simply "spoke me" without asking my permission.

When I saw behavior and emotions for what they were (a barometer of what was happening inside), it helped immensely. Emotion was not a

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“thing” I could decide to feel or not feel but merely reflected what was going on inside myself.

It is worth noting that I stopped stuttering temporarily for a few weeks after this blowup. But once again, “temporarily” is the word to remember here.

## *THE POWER OF OBSERVATION*

John Harrison wrote a great deal about authentic observation: Observing our own beliefs, values and attitudes turned out to be what I did to extricate myself from negative influences, such as wrong beliefs, perceptions, etc.

Observation allows us to see what is going on...how we keep creating the beliefs that trap us and cause us to hold back. It is clear to me that what happened between the time I blocked and held back and now (when the impulse to hold back is gone) was that my hexagon changed from negative to positive. During the years I held back, this is a picture of what was going on.

1. I saw speech as painstakingly manufactured by conscious will/intention. (Perception)
2. My conditioned mind was convinced that conscious knowing (instruction, skill, talent, effort) was required to speak well. My inherited conditioned belief system placed great value on “perfect product” rather than originality and spontaneity. (Belief)
3. This conditioning was a pervasive barrier to flow. The harder I tried to speak well, the more I held back and blocked. (Behavior)
4. The more I blocked and held back, the “worse” I felt. (Emotion)
5. My perceptions, beliefs, behavior and emotions affected my physiological responses. My heart pounded and stress mounted.
6. I woke up each day with new resolve to speak fluently but failure destroyed this resolve.

## *MY POST-STUTTERING HEXAGON*

1. I see that speech is a gift, a flowing river that does not depend on conscious control. Speech is part of my spontaneous nature not created by my conscious mind. (Perception)
  2. My perception of how speech happens changes my beliefs. I don’t have to manufacture speech anymore, so speech is easy. I no longer believe I have to think before speaking. When my conscious mind attempts to
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interfere, I recognize this as resistance to flow. (Belief)

3. I speak freely when I go with the flow. I am centered on saying what I mean and meaning what I say, and I watch your face to see if you understand me. (Behavior)

4. Free and easy speech affects my emotions. I don't have to try anymore. Effort and turmoil is gone. I feel peaceful. I calm down. I feel free to respond to what you say and notice your response to me. (Emotion)

5. My muscles relax. I notice the warm glow I feel when letting go of conscious control. I notice there is no stress, effort, trying, pressure. No more pounding heart; no more desire to run away. (Physiological responses)

6. I can now carry out my intentions. This is the meaning of success for me. As I give up control of my speech, I attain a single-minded state of high clear-sighted functioning and satisfaction. I have a clear resolve to say what I mean and mean what I say and am able to do so without holding back. (Intention)

## *LOOKING AT THE BIG PICTURE*

Paying attention to all six elements involved in the Hexagon was helpful to me. At first I had been stuck on "behavior" alone. Although the successes I was able to achieve under certain circumstances (when I was around supportive people, for example) affected certain components of the Hexagon (especially "emotion"), those improvements also turned out to be temporary for me. Many times, after meeting with supportive people, I would temporarily improve, but I realized I needed to move on. What I was doing was addressing other parts of the hexagon, particularly *perceptions* and *beliefs*. Only then did I realize permanent gains.

An element of the Hexagon that had an effect on my holding back was beliefs...in my case, wrong and distorted beliefs. When I was holding back and blocking to an incredible degree I was operating under dinosaur beliefs. My inherited mental conditioning tended to believe in (value) "perfection" or "perfect product" rather than originality, meaning and spontaneity. This conditioning served, without question, to hold back natural and spontaneous flow.

I also believed that conscious knowing (instruction, skill, talent, effort) was required to speak well (denying that speech is the natural way I express my spontaneous intelligence.) The day I was able to shine the light on one particularly bothersome obscure hidden belief and expose it to the light of day was a great day for me. I was writing about a "literal block in my throat around which I need to blow air in order to make a

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sound.” As soon as those words hit the page, I read the words and BOOM....there it was! Right there in black and white! *This* was apparently what I believed! It was incredible! I didn’t attempt to sugarcoat the words I had written on the page. I didn’t judge the words or explain the words away. I simply became aware for the first time that this distorted twisted little belief, along with many more just like it, had hunkered down in some dark corner of my mind, making trouble for me every day until the day I noticed it. I grabbed it by the nap of the neck and jerked it out of hiding.

The moment I became aware of this ridiculous belief...poof, it went away. I didn’t have to try to change that belief. I didn’t have to talk about it. All I had to do was turn the light on that particular silly belief, and it went away, never to appear again. As soon as the belief went away, so did my fear. Over and over I found that ridiculous unobserved beliefs were inextricably linked to emotion and when the belief went away, my fear did, too.

### *IMAGINARY BELIEFS*

It all reminded me of what happened when the children were small and believed there was a “boogiemán” hiding in the corner of the dark room at night. As soon as I switched on the light, poof, fear was gone (until their imaginations were able to create another boogiemán...and another, and another). But for the moment, turning on the light was all it took to evaporate the belief...and the fear.

When I discovered this particular wrong belief I had created out of thin air (the belief that I had a literal lump in my throat), I began to take personal responsibility for creating blocks. I saw that blocks didn’t just happen to me. My imagination (part of Little Me) had been busy creating one boogiemán after another most of my life. I opened my eyes and kept them open, hunting down these distortions and bringing them into the light of my awareness...and I got pretty good at spotting these images and confronting them. My ability to see (perceive) what was going on took the scary out of life.

### *YOU HAVE EYES TO SEE*

I also dealt with what Harrison refers to as “perceptions.” I could not get rid of wrong beliefs without perception. Sometimes I call this “observation” or noticing or looking. The day came that my unrealistic view of speech began to unravel. That memorable day I asked an elderly gentleman if his speaking engagements wore him out. He answered “No. Traveling wears me out a bit, but speaking doesn’t wear me out.”

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So I asked “You mean you don’t have to think of every word you say, like how to form words in your mouth, how to slow down when you talk, how to take a deep breath before a long sentence?”

The kind man looked puzzled and finally asked if I was serious. When I assured him I was, he asked politely: “Why do you ask? Is this what you do when you speak?” When I nodded “yes”, his eyes widened, his mouth fell open and he shook his head unbelievably. “I can’t imagine how weary I would be if I had to do that” he said. “I guess I would never bother to say a word.”

Why hadn’t it occurred to me to ask anyone this question before? I clearly had simply believed that speech was as hard for others as it was for me, and my friend’s answer to my question left me in shock. Here was a person (who saw speech as easy, spontaneous and automatic) sitting across the table from me (a person who saw speech as difficult, conscious and controlled). This man’s view of speech was behind his fluency, just as my view of speech resulted in behavior (over-thinking, over-monitoring, and overcontrolling my speech.)

So my view of speech began to evolve, along with my beliefs. I created powerful metaphors that helped change my view of speech. But there could have been no permanent change in my speech if either perceptions or beliefs had remained unobserved and, therefore, unchanged. Paying attention to all elements of the Hexagon eliminated blocking and holding back in this one area of my life (speech). I am now using this same Hexagon to rid myself of writing blocks,

We who stutter are “blocked creatives,” and I believe John Harrison has created in his Hexagon the framework to set us free of blocks in whatever area we hold back or block.



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## HOW I RECOVERED FROM CHRONIC STUTTERING

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by John C. Harrison

*I knew that at some point I had to recount my own recovery story, but the process seemed daunting. How much do I tell? What do I leave out? I kept putting it off. Then I was invited to give the keynote at the Annual Meeting of the British Stammering Association in London on September 8, 2002. Here was the ideal opportunity to finally draw together the significant speech-related events from my own life. I could also demonstrate what I meant by transforming the Stuttering Hexagon. I set out to encapsulate my stuttering journey into a 90-minute presentation. This is a slightly edited version of the talk I gave at Imperial College.*

**S**tuttering had a major impact on my life in any number of ways. It affected how I saw myself. It influenced my choice of careers. It colored my ambitions. And it contributed to my uncertain view of the world and of life in general. Stuttering was woven into the very fabric of my existence, and I wrestled with it more or less for 30 years.

My stuttering was very situational. Around my friends, I could usually speak without difficulty. But if I had to speak in class, talk to authority figures, get on a bus and ask for a transfer, or stop a stranger on the street, I'd block. And as far as standing up and speaking in front of a group...forget it.

And yet I recovered. When I say I recovered, I don't mean that I'm a controlled stutterer. I mean that the impulse to block is no longer present. It's gone.

According to most people, that's not supposed to happen. I've heard hundreds and hundreds of people say, "There's no cure for stuttering." "Once a stutterer, always a stutterer." "Nobody knows what causes stuttering." Many of those people have been in the professional community. Mostly, they talk about controlling one's stuttering. But they don't talk about disappearing it.

That at least some people can make their stuttering disappear — and I've met a number who have — is an important statement on the nature of stuttering.

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## SOLVING THE UNSOLVABLE

The reason why we haven't been more successful in addressing stuttering since speech pathology was first introduced as a field of study in the 1920s is that for all this time...in my opinion and in the opinion of a growing number of others...stuttering has been incorrectly characterized. We've been using the wrong paradigm. We've been solving the wrong problem.

If you're trying to solve a problem, the way you *define* and *frame* the problem has everything to do with whether you'll be able to come up with an answer.

Employing the right paradigm is important because a paradigm filters incoming information. Anything that doesn't fall within the defined characteristics of the paradigm is deemed to be unimportant and irrelevant, although much of what remains unnoticed may be necessary to solve the problem.

Another reason why we've been stuck in our thinking about stuttering is that, by and large, most of us focus our attention in looking for answers in all the familiar places.

It's like the man who's walking home one night, and comes upon a fellow crawling around on his knees under a street light, obviously looking for something.

*"Hey, buddy, need some help?"*

*"Sure do," says the man. "I lost my car keys."*

*"Well, let me give you a hand," says the passerby. And for the next five minutes they both crawl around under the street light, looking for the keys.*

*Finally, the passer-by says, "Are you sure you lost the keys here?"*

*"Oh no," says the man. "I lost them over there," and points to a section of grass beyond the reach of the light.*

*"Well, for pete's sake," says the passerby in frustration. "Why are you looking here?"*

*"Light's better," says the man.*

The reason why I'm standing here talking to you today, having disappeared my stuttering, is in part because I never looked for answers in the "well-lit" familiar places. Why? Well, for one thing, I had a simple block and never developed a lot of secondary behaviors. Therefore, I never worked with a speech therapist. Therefore, I never got into the traditional thinking about stuttering as something you had to control. Therefore, my search for answers was not colored by other people's ideas. I was not told what was important and what was not. I never developed the familiar filters through which most people viewed stuttering. And that's why I was able to see more clearly what was going on with my speech.

What I discovered over time was that my stuttering was not about my

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speech per se. It was about *my comfort in communicating with others*. It was a problem that involved *all* of me — how I thought, how I felt, how I spoke, how I was programmed to respond.

By the way, when I say “stuttering,” I’m not talking about the easy and unconscious disfluencies that many people have when they’re upset, confused, embarrassed, uncertain, or discombobulated (what I call *bobulating*). I’m talking about struggled, blocked speech in which you are unable to say one or more words in a timely manner; speech that feels “stuck.”

Although I’ve shared pieces of how I recovered, I’ve never before told the overall story. So that’s what I’m going to do here. I’m going to talk about the key factors that contributed to my recovery. I’ll also relate this to the Stuttering Hexagon so you can see how the changes in my speech were a reflection of the way I changed *as a person*.

## *EARLY EXPERIENCES*

My disfluent speech began when I was three years old. My mother and grandmother had gone to Europe for six weeks, and the day my mother returned, I took her into the garden and said, “Mommy, look look look at the flower.” I don’t remember that day. But I do know that by the age of four, my father was very concerned about my speech and started running me around to various experts. One of them told my father that I was a nervous child and that I seemed to stutter more when my mother was around.

There are also indications that, although I started out with a very close and intimate relationship with my mom, something happened to change this. I don’t know what it was. But by the age of seven or eight, I no longer liked to have her hug me. I was prone to hold in my feelings. I also remember that I was an extremely sensitive child and that it didn’t take much to hurt my feelings.

## *SENSITIVITY AND STUTTERING*

NSA member Libby Oyler, who is both a person who stutters and a speech language pathologist, conducted some fascinating research on the relationship of sensitivity and stuttering for her Ph.D. thesis. The numbers she gave me took me by surprise.

Libby found that although 15 to 20 percent of the general population can be classified as “highly sensitive,” that number climbs to a startling 83 percent for people who stutter.

What does “highly sensitive” mean? On the plus side, it means that you’re more intuitive. You pick up feelings and subtle aspects of commu-

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nication, both verbal and nonverbal, that don't register with less sensitive people. But it also means you're more quickly aroused. Your senses are easily stimulated and sometimes, overwhelmed. You react more strongly when somebody yells at you. It's easier to get you excited or upset. If somebody doesn't like the way you act, they don't have to yell at you or openly mock you to deliver their message. They just have to raise an eyebrow or give you a look, and the message comes through loud and clear.

Libby's research also highlighted something else. About 10 to 15 percent of the general population can be classified as *behaviorally inhibited*. These people find it harder to be out in the world. They're profoundly more vulnerable. They're more subject to overarousal. It's harder to calm them down. Their brain doesn't regulate sensory integration well and doesn't filter out information efficiently so they can relax. For the stuttering population, the percentage of behaviorally inhibited people is not 10 or 15 percent...it's 42 percent.

Similar information was reported in the British Stammering Association's July 2002 newsletter *Speaking Out* in a brief article about research conducted by speech-language pathologist Barry Guitar. People who stuttered were more nervous or tense or excessively excitable than people who didn't. And they also had a greater startle response.

Did all that apply to me? I think so. If someone were cross with me, or raised their voice, just like that, I'd be upset. I was totally focused on pleasing others and on being nice. And because I was highly sensitive, I was quick to pick up any signs of disapproval.

Is this hypersensitivity what caused my stuttering? No. But it was part of it.

## *PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS*

I recall that as a small child when I used to say my prayers at night, they always began with, "Please, Oh Lord, help me to talk without stuttering, help me keep my back straight, and help prevent all wars."

Help me keep my back straight? What boy in his right mind would pray for that?

I'll tell you what kind. A boy who didn't feel he was okay the way he was and who was totally focused on pleasing his mom. Now if I had such a charge on keeping my back straight that I included it in my prayers, imagine the charge I had about stuttering, which was number one on the hierarchy.

Here are more things about me. I never got angry. In fact, I was uncomfortable with emotions, just like everyone else in my family. It wasn't until the age of 30 in an encounter group that I ever got angry and blew up at another person. Imagine that. I went 30 years without ever

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getting angry. *And I thought that was perfectly natural.*

Then there was my compulsive need to do things right. In middle school, if I wrote a character like an “a” or an “e” too quickly and it filled in, I’d cross it out and write it correctly right above it....until the teacher finally commanded me to stop doing that.

Is this perfectionism what caused my stuttering? No, it’s not what caused it. But it was a contributing factor.

My earliest memory of being really scared about speaking was when our seventh grade class had to perform a scene from a play at a middle school assembly. The play was Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, and I was playing the part of Puck. I only had a couple of lines which started out — “I came with Hermia hither.”

Well, did I worry about *that* for four weeks! I was afraid I couldn’t say the “h” words. I was panicked about being in front of 100 kids and teachers and standing there with my mouth open, not being able to say a word...because I had this *speech* problem. That’s all I could see. I had this speech problem.

I did survive it, because I had a trick. I discovered that if I could evacuate most of the air in my lungs, I could talk on the residual air and get the word out. And that’s what I did. When the time came, I said, “I came with (long exhale) Hermia hither.” Oh, I got some funny looks. But I got the words out.

Nevertheless, that experience and many others like it reinforced my belief that I had a speech problem. How wrong I was. I didn’t have a speech problem. I could speak just fine when I was alone. The problem lay in my *relationship* with the people I was speaking to. I had a problem with *the experience of communicating to others*. It was my *experience* of expressing who I was that I had fears about. And it manifested itself in my speech.

## *MY EARLY HEXAGON*

Let’s see what my hexagon looked like at the age of 12. I had a belief that it was dangerous to show my emotions. It was dangerous to be assertive. I believed that I had to do everything correctly. I believed that everyone was judging me...not just my speech...but *me*. I had very low self-esteem. Whatever I did, I had a fear of not being good enough. And I had a fear of acting out of character with my passive self-image. Speaking forcefully in front of the middle school, on the other hand, required self-esteem. Consequently, I had a conflict, and I resolved it by holding myself back.

By the age of twelve I had so completely made myself over to fit the expectations of others that I didn’t know who *I* was. Looking back to that “Hermia hither” moment, it’s very clear what I was afraid of. I was afraid of experiencing the excitement of being *me*. I was holding back *me*, using such

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strategies as locking my vocal cords, pursing my lips, and holding my breath. For some reason, there was something bad about showing up as myself.

How did this happen? How did I get divorced from my real self? How do any of us get so cut off from who we are that we feel compelled to hold back and create a false self?

## *LOSING MYSELF*

One of the most elegant statements of how we lose ourselves appeared back in 1962 in a book by Abraham Maslow. Maslow was part of a group called the “third force psychologists.” These were psychologists whose main interest was not in pathology. They wanted to understand the self-realizing individual. The person who was super healthy, who consistently operated on a higher level than the rest of us. The person who frequently had what they called “peak experiences.”

What stops us all from being able to reach that same level of functioning?

As little children, we *need* the approval of others. We need it for safety. We need it for food. We need it for love and respect. The prospect of losing all that is terrifying. So if we have to choose between being loved and being ourselves, it's no contest. We abandon ourselves and die a kind of secret psychic death.

Maslow wrote a seminal book called, *Towards a Psychology of Being* which looked at these issues. In that book was a beautiful description, written by G. Allport, of how it is possible to lose yourself and isolate yourself from your deepest sources of power...and not even know that you're doing it. Listen to Allport's description of a child who's forced to make that choice:

*He has not been accepted for himself, as he is. “Oh, they ‘love’ him, but they want him or force him or expect him to be different! Therefore he must be unacceptable. He himself learns to believe it and at last, even takes it for granted. He has truly given himself up. No matter now whether he obeys them, whether he clings, rebels or withdraws — his behavior, his performance is all that matters. His center of gravity is in ‘them,’ not in himself. Yet, if he so much as noticed it, he’d think it natural enough. And the whole thing is entirely plausible; all invisible, automatic, and anonymous!*

*This is the perfect paradox. Everything looks normal; no crime was intended; there is no corpse, no guilt. All we can see is the sun rising and setting as usual. But what has happened? He has been rejected, not only by them, but by himself. (He is actually without a self.) What has he lost? Just the one true and vital part of himself: his own yes-feeling, which is his very capacity for growth, his root*

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system.

*But alas he is not dead. 'Life' goes on, and so must he. From the moment he gives himself up, and to the extent that he does so, all unknowingly he sets about to create and maintain a pseudo-self. But this is an expediency—a 'self' without wishes. This one shall be loved (or feared) where he is despised, strong where he is weak; it shall go through the motions (oh, but they are caricatures!) not for fun or joy, but for survival; not simply because it wants to move but because it has to obey. This necessity is not life—not his life—it is a defense mechanism against death. From now on he will be torn apart by compulsive (unconscious) needs or ground by (unconscious) conflicts into paralysis, every motion and every instant canceling out his being, his integrity; and all the while he is disguised as a normal person and expected to behave like one!*

So there I was, afraid to say, "I came with Hermia hither" ...feeling that it was not okay to be myself in front of the middle school. But all I could see was that I had a stuttering problem.

## *LIMITING RELATIONSHIPS*

Something that greatly contributes to the holding back process is the relationship you have with those around you. Have you noticed that it's easy to speak to some people and impossible to speak to others without stuttering? I noticed that. When I was in middle school, I was shy and unassertive. I was not much of a presence in the class. But I had an experience around that time that caused me to wonder.

My parents had friends who lived in New Jersey, and they had a daughter named Barbara Lee. We were invited out there one weekend, and I spent two days with Barbara Lee and her crowd. I hardly recognized myself. I was outspoken, I was funny, I didn't hold back, and I didn't stutter. People listened to me if I had something to say. Then I went back home and instantly turned back into this shy, quiet kid that nobody listened to. A shy, quiet kid who held himself back and who stuttered.

In retrospect, it became clear that over time, my friends expected me to show up as shy and unassertive, and they related to me accordingly. I, in turn, related to them the way they related to me, and presto! I was locked in a role I couldn't get out of.

Over the last 26 years, I've seen many examples of how a person gets locked into a role and how it affects his speech. One of these moments took place at an NSA chapter meeting about 20 years ago. Frank\* was an older fellow, a really nice, unassuming guy with a moderate stutter. One evening, it was my turn to run the meeting, and I came in with some silly poetry for

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\* Frank's name has been changed.

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people to read. What I gave to Frank was a stanza from Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* in which the Mock Turtle is singing this plaintive song in a voice choked with sobs. Now keep in mind that Frank was a software engineer. The poem goes this way:

*Beautiful Soup, so rich and green,  
Waiting in a hot tureen!  
Who for such dainties would not stoop?  
Soup of the evening, beautiful Soup!  
Soup of the evening, beautiful Soup!  
    Beau—ootiful Soo—oop!  
    Beau—ootiful Soo—oop!  
Soo—oop of the e—e—evening,  
    Beautiful, beautiful Soup!*

I told Frank to ham it up and be as silly and outrageous as he liked. He did. He was totally silly. Instead of speaking in his usual flat voice, he was really expressive, and Frank was totally fluent. At the end of the meeting, I asked Frank how he managed to let go so much. You know what he said to me?

“You gave me permission.”

What was interesting was that Frank's wife also came to the meeting. She was a severe, stern-faced woman who had no apparent interest in participating. She spent the entire meeting knitting. I looked at her and thought, “I know why Frank doesn't let go and be himself. He married his mom. He was still caught up with being a good boy.”

So the people around you and how you relate to them will have a big impact on your willingness to let go — that is, if you choose to hand over your power to them.

What I discovered through my own recovery process was that, at the heart of it, stuttering isn't a problem with the *production* of speech. All of us can talk just fine when we're alone. It's a problem with the *experience* of speaking. It's a problem with our discomfort when we communicate to particular individuals and in particular situations.

And it's about the strategies we adopt to manage this discomfort.

What really frustrated me in high school was that one moment I'd be talking, and the next moment I'd be locked up and unable to say a word. I could talk to my friends in the school yard and be perfectly fluent, but giving a book report in front of those same friends in the classroom, I'd only get a few words out before I'd block. Sometimes I wished that I'd stutter all the time. At least then I'd know who I was.

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## *SOME EARLY DISCOVERIES*

I spent hours in my room, trying to figure out what was happening with my speech when I locked up. I'd tighten my tongue or purse my lips, but it just wasn't the same. When I actually blocked, it seemed like something was happening *to* me. In fact, it was not until I got to college that I made any kind of progress with my speech.

In my sophomore year I took a class in public speaking, and because I was anxious about my stuttering, I decided to confess to the professor that I had a problem. He was very interested in helping, and invited me to come by after class. One thing he did that day was to get out some books and pictures and explained to me how speech was created. It sounds like such an obvious thing, but nobody had ever done that before. For almost 20 years I had been totally in the dark about what was going on inside my throat and chest when I spoke and when I blocked.

Now, for the first time, I could actually picture how speech was produced...what it looked like. The effect of that session with the speech professor was to take some of the mystery out of the speaking process. I could picture in my mind what I might be doing when I blocked. I don't know about you, but when I understand something, I don't fear it as much.

I also took a big leap by giving a talk in my speech class about stuttering — the first time I talked publicly about it. The reaction of the class was great. People were interested. I didn't feel like a weirdo, and it made speaking much easier for the rest of the semester.

By the time I graduated college, I still blocked, though not as much. But more than anything, I had started to observe, not just my stuttering, but all the areas around my stuttering. And while I didn't have any answers, I was starting to define the questions.

## *THE POWER OF OBSERVATION*

The ability to observe is absolutely critical if you want to change yourself in any way. Observing, in its highest form, is called mindfulness. It's a meditation term. What it calls for is to clear your mind and simply notice what's going on. Don't just notice the familiar things. See if you can observe everything, dispassionately, without an agenda. When you can do that...when you can observe without trying to fit what you see into any preexisting paradigm...it's often surprising the kinds of things you discover.

For example, back in the 60's when you couldn't pump your own petrol, I'd drive into the service station near our apartment and have to ask the attendant to "Fill it up." Some days I could say it perfectly without a hitch.

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Other days, when the attendant came over, I *knew* I was going to block, and I'd have to resort to starter phrases like, "Mmmm, ahhhh 'ow are ya an' can ya fill it up please."

Why were those days different?

If I were focusing only on my speech, I'd never been able to explain it. But by then I was routinely looking at all aspects of the speaking situation. You know what I finally realized? On the days when I was getting on with my wife, I had no trouble. But on days when I was feeling angry or resentful or hurt and was holding all my feelings in, those were the days I'd have trouble.

Then why was I having a problem with the attendant? I wasn't hurt or angry at him? I discovered that if I allowed myself to connect in a personal way with someone else, what you might call having an encounter, or an open, direct communication, those other feelings would want to come out. That was scary. I didn't want to experience those repressed feelings. So I would get this danger signal from my body that there was something to fear, and my default reaction was to hold back and block.

What encouraged me to make observations like this? My mind was never shaped by the traditional beliefs of speech therapy, including the biggie—having to control my speech. And because, I kept a broad focus, it was amazing the things I uncovered.

Most people are not very good observers. But they can learn to be. And this is critical if you want to get over this problem. I never had any formal speech therapy, but I did undertake my own. Whether or not you work with a therapist, there are a lot of things that *you* can do by yourself.

For example, just by experimenting, I discovered that if I released a little air before I spoke, I was less likely to block. I later found out that this was the air flow technique promoted by Dr. Martin Schwartz in New York.

If I did block, I discovered I could get a better handle on what I was doing if I repeated the block and then said the word the way I wanted to, without the block. Later I found out that this is was the "cancellation" process developed by Charles Van Riper.

I found that if I were really tense and took a deep breath, it helped to relax my body. This is somewhat similar to the costal breathing that's an integral part of the McGuire program.

Now don't get me wrong. I'm not against speech therapy. In a very real way, I did go through speech therapy. I went through my own. And it really does help to know what you're doing when you stutter, to know it so well that you can reproduce it on purpose and learn to relax the muscles that you're tightening. It's like taking apart your tennis swing. The reason you hit too many balls into the net *may be* because you have a performance fear. But it may also be because you're not swinging correctly.

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Will changing your swing make you as good a player as Serena Williams? Probably not. But having a proper swing *is* one of the factors that makes a good tennis player. And speaking in a way that does not interfere with the production of speech *is* one factor you may need to address in the recovery process.

So again, proper speaking technique is not the whole story. But it's a part of it.

### *CERTAIN PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS ARE HELPFUL*

One's personality characteristics can also play a role in the recovery process. I just *hate* it when something doesn't work right. As my wife, Doris, can tell you, I've stayed up many nights until 3 a.m. troubleshooting a problem on my Macintosh computer. Sometimes, that compulsiveness drives me a little batty. But as far as stuttering goes, it worked in my favor. Because whenever I couldn't speak, I was compulsively drawn to figuring out why.

It also helps if you're counterphobic. When I'm afraid of something, I tend to manage the fear by moving toward the threat and dealing with it directly, rather than running away from it. For example, every time I got on a bus, I'd ask for a transfer, whether I wanted it or not. Sometimes I could say transfer, but most of the time, I couldn't. I had to keep pushing it, because I was afraid of what would happen to me if I *didn't*. I was afraid to hide.

### *TOASTMASTERS INTERNATIONAL*

At the age of 25, I left New York and a safe job in my father's ad agency and boarded a plane to California. Smartest move I ever made. I needed 3,000 miles between me and my family, not because they controlled my life, but because I needed them to tell me who I was. In California, I didn't have that crutch. For the first time in my life, I was really on my own.

I found a job as an advertising copywriter. I found an apartment. And I joined the junior advertising club. The very first meeting, there were 45 people seated around a very large conference table, and the president of the club said, "Let's start out by having everyone introduce themselves." I was next to last.

I couldn't belong to this club if each meeting I had to go through the terror of introducing myself. I had to find a way to confront the fear directly, and that's when I joined Toastmasters.

Toastmasters is one of the truly great organizations for those with

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speaking fears, because it gives you an opportunity to speak in front of others in a risk-free environment. Oops. Did I say “risk free?” Not quite. It’s true, there are no consequences if you block or give a jumbled speech or even stand there with your mouth open and saying nothing. Nobody is going to fire you. And people in Toastmasters are always very supportive. But there is a risk. The risk is to your ego and your self-image. I don’t know how many times I left a Toastmasters meeting feeling like I came off poorly.

However, what those three years in Toastmasters did for me was to provide a place that offered both absolute safety *and* the experience of risk taking. It was safe in that, even if I blocked or went blank or totally screwed up, there were no consequences. Nobody would tell me to find another job. Nobody would make fun of me. People were there to support me in becoming a better speaker.

It felt risky because my ego was on the line. I would sometimes go home totally mortified about how awful I must have looked in the meeting. Probably, I wasn’t awful. It was just my old self-consciousness and perfectionism coming up. But by showing up week after week, I slowly became more comfortable in front of people.

Very slowly I was starting to change how I saw myself. And that accelerated in a big way when I became involved with an organization called Synanon.

### *THE POWER OF THE SYNANON GAME*

To give you a little background — Synanon was a unique 24-hour, residential, self-help rehabilitation program. The residents were all prostitutes, drug addicts, thieves, holdup artists, and other ex-felons you’d classify as people with acting out character disorders. I was drawn to the organization as a sponsor, as were many others in the community.

One of the unique contributions of Synanon was a form of group therapy called the Synanon Game. Drug addicts and other repeat offenders are hard to reach because they’re so manipulative. Being street-wise, they know all the right words to make a psychiatrist or counselor feel good. This makes it really tough to get them to change their behavior.

So the founder of Synanon, an ex-alcoholic named Chuck Dederich, created a highly unique, group dynamic in which people could learn to *manipulate* each other into telling the truth. The only way to “win” in this game was to be candid and honest. If you weren’t, you’d get manipulated into all kinds of corners, and made to look very dumb and foolish. The focus of the group would drift from one person to another. At one moment, you’d be on the hot seat. An hour later you’d be running the riot act on someone else. The Game was good, because not only did it pressure you into telling the truth, it also improved your ability to deal with others, and it gave you

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a chance to explore your feelings.

One evening in 1965 I and a group of sponsors were playing a Synanon Game in a living room in Sausalito, across the bay from San Francisco. In the group were a builder, a lawyer, a travel agent, a cartoonist and a dozen others like myself who you'd classify as ordinary people.

We also had one Synanon resident with us by the name of Jack Hurst. During the game he said to me, "John, if you stay around for a while, we're going to make your stuttering disappear."

After three years of having people see the most unflattering sides of me, I realized one day that Jack's prophesy had come true. I still blocked on occasion, but after interacting with hundreds and hundreds of people in a very intimate setting, I had a different perception of myself, my speech, and other people.

I realized that I didn't block because I had something wrong with the way I talked. I blocked because I had difficulties with *the experience of communicating to others*, especially in particular situations. It was as if I finally looked under the hood to see what was *really* making the car run. And it wasn't what I thought it was.

What did I find? Well, you name it. I had difficulties with self-assertion. I found it hard to express my feelings. I was a rampant perfectionist. I was overly sensitive. Most times, I didn't know what I felt, and even when I did, I often wasn't forthcoming because of how people might react. I had very low self-esteem. I was obsessively focused on being nice and pleasing others. I was constantly beset by my conflicting intentions. Oh yes, I also had a tendency to hold my breath and tighten my throat when I moved too far out of my comfort zone.

If I wanted to survive in those Games, something had to give. I couldn't survive by being nice and trying to please everyone, because every time I did, I'd find myself pushed into corners and looking totally stupid. You see, people wanted you to define who YOU were. What YOU wanted. What YOU stood for. I didn't start out having answers to any of these questions, but over time, the answers began to come.

In the Games, I also had my first exposure to strong emotions. In my family, people didn't laugh hard and cry hard and argue hard. We were always restrained and guarded. But in the Games, quite the opposite was true. People laughed a lot. And cried a lot. And sometimes people got really angry and blew up.

Far from being intimidated, I found the energy exciting during those moments, as when a squadron of low flying jet fighters thunders in overhead and every part of you resonates with the noise. When I finally let go and blew up at somebody, it was a totally satisfying feeling!

After many, many hours of interacting with others in these Games, I

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stopped seeing what I was doing as something called “stuttering.” I started seeing it as a system of behaviors and personal characteristics that were organized in a way that caused me to hold back and block.

One of the big surprises was how much I was like everyone else. In the beginning, I felt different, in part because I stuttered. But week after week of listening to other people’s stories, I began to see that we were all pretty much the same. People are people. Eventually, it got to where, after just 10 minutes into the game, I would find a point of connection with everyone in the room.

### *S. I. HAWAKAYA OPENS DOORS*

Another aspect of myself that changed was my relationship to authority.

Do you find it more difficult to talk to authority figures like a boss or a parent or an expert of some sort?

My feelings toward authority began to evolve when I started taking graduate classes at San Francisco State College in the mid-60s. The most fascinating of those classes was taught by a nationally known general semanticist by the name of S. I. Hayakawa who had written a landmark book called *Language in Thought and Action*. Hayakawa was the most innovative and unorthodox teacher I’ve ever experienced.

In the first class, Hayakawa began by describing his grading system. “Everyone in the class is guaranteed a B,” he said. “No matter what you do, you’ll still get a B. At the end of the semester, if you feel your participation deserves an A, all you have to do is come and ask me, and I’ll give you an A. No questions asked. I only reserve the right to give an A to someone who I feel deserves it but is too modest to ask.”

I was shocked. I couldn’t believe my ears. For the first time in an academic setting, there was no pressure on me to perform.

It was in Hayakawa’s class that I first realized how much I was intimidated by authority and how that undercut my own sense of self. Hayakawa asked us to write a paper a week on anything we wanted. Any length. Any subject. Any language. Because I didn’t have any requirements to fill, every word, right from the beginning, was mine. I wrote on the things that I wanted. What a wonderful (and bizarre) experience that was. Back in college, if the professor asked us to write a 1000 word paper, *my* paper would start with word 1001. But in Hayakawa’s class, with every word I wrote, I experienced what it felt like to be my own person, to write from the heart, and to be supported and recognized by the authority at hand. Slowly, I was beginning to become my own authority.

You know how the classes unfolded? Twenty-five people would sit in

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a large circle. Around 7 p.m., Hayakawa would saunter in, sit down, look around, and say, "Well, what'll we talk about tonight?"

Some people were intimidated by the lack of structure. I LOVED IT!!! How liberating it was! I could finally take a deep breath and be myself. I had never had that as a child. People were always telling me what to do, and how to do it. I never knew what it felt like to speak spontaneously, freely, and honestly in the presence of a non-judgmental authority figure and be totally supported.

In general semantics, which is what Hayakawa taught, I learned how the structure of language shaped my sense of reality. I began to see the way English forced me into either-or propositions and how easy it was to attach labels. I'm a success. I'm a failure. I'm a stutterer. I'm not a stutterer. I'm good. I'm bad. It gradually dawned on me that I was creating my own stressful world by my habits of thought. General semantics gave me tools to circumvent these problems.

I was encouraged to constantly challenge my own perceptions. If I blocked, and somebody smiled, I automatically assumed they were laughing at me. General semantics taught me to question things like that. It taught me that my *perception* of reality was not reality at all. It was only my perception. The person could be smiling for any number of reasons. Maybe I just said something that reminded them of a funny experience. Maybe their drawers were too tight, and that smile was a grimace of pain.

Similarly, my beliefs were not reality. They were just a map of reality. I learned to question whether or not my maps were accurate and to not take anything I perceived on face value.

Something I came to realize was that whenever someone was upset, I automatically thought it was because of something I'd done. That created additional stress. It also put me in a one-down position, and it created fertile ground for speech blocks. Once I got in the habit of challenging my perceptions, I started to see that most events had many possible explanations. Changing how I thought played a vital role in my recovery.

There were many, many things like those I just described that contributed to the broadening picture of myself and of the world at large. But I'm hoping that touching on some of the highlights will give you the flavor of the recovery process...and that you'll see that stuttering is a problem that involves *all* of you.

Do all perfectionists stutter? No. Does everyone who holds back his feelings, stutter? No. Are all highly sensitive people subject to stuttering? No. Do all people who grow up with a higher level of childhood disfluency stutter? No. Does everyone who gives up their real self and creates a false self stutter? No. Do all people who use the language in a nonself supportive way stutter? No.

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But what happens when you take all these factors and pull them together? If you pull them together in the right way, you create a self-reinforcing system that's greater than the sum of the parts. It's not the parts, *but how they go together* that creates the blocking behaviors that most people call stuttering.

Remember, unless you put the parts together correctly, you don't end up with chronic blocking.

## DRAMATICALLY DIFFERENT HEXAGONS

By the age of 35, stuttering had pretty much disappeared from my life. To understand why, it might be useful to compare my hexagons as an early teenager, and as someone in his mid-30s.

### John, age 15

#### BELIEFS

I have no worth (low self-esteem).  
 I must be nice at all costs.  
 What I have to say is unimportant.  
 I have to please everybody.  
 People are focused on me.  
 The world wants me to be good.  
 Expressing feelings is bad.  
 The world has to meet my mother's standard.  
 My needs always come second.

#### PERCEPTIONS

People are judging me.  
 I'm not measuring up.  
 I'm being aggressive.  
 The other person is speaking the "truth."

#### INTENTIONS

My intentions to speak and not speak are fighting each other.

### John, age 35

#### BELIEFS

I am worthy (good self-esteem).  
 I must be genuinely me.  
 What I have to say is important.  
 I have to please myself.  
 People are focused on themselves.  
 The world wants me to be me.  
 Expressing feelings is desirable.  
 The world is perfect the way it is.  
 I can decide when my needs have priority.

#### PERCEPTIONS

I'm the one who's judging me.  
 I'm doing the best I can.  
 I'm being assertive.  
 The other person *may be* speaking the truth (and maybe not.)

#### INTENTIONS

My intentions are in alignment.  
 I'm clear when I want to speak. I'm also aware when I'm resisting speaking.

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**PHYSIOLOGICAL RESPONSES**

I am sensitive and quick to react.

**PHYSICAL BEHAVIORS**

I tighten my lips and vocal chords  
and hold my breath when I'm  
worried about speaking.

I hold back.

**PHYSIOLOGICAL RESPONSES**

I am sensitive and quick to react.

**PHYSICAL BEHAVIORS**

I keep everything loose and supple.

I let go.

As you can see it wasn't just my speech that had changed. It was the total me. I had a bigger, broader self-image that encompassed more of who I was. I had a more realistic appreciation of how the world "was." I was more comfortable with my own feelings and with living in my own skin. My fluency wasn't just the result of correcting bad speech habits, it had equally to do with my willingness to let go and be me.

### ***OUR UNDERSTANDING OF STUTTERING IS BROADENING***

Where are we going with stuttering? Are we starting to make some progress? I think so. My guess is that midway through this decade, there will be definitive answers to what chronic stuttering is all about and how to approach it. In fact, I believe we have most of the answers right now, if we only recognize what we already know. The reason why I think this will happen is similar to what is happening with the SETI project.

SETI, as you may know, stands for the Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence and is the program that is organizing the effort to find intelligent life in outer space. Among other things, SETI is collecting voluminous amounts of radio broadcasts from deep space. These data need to be processed and analyzed for instances of intelligent transmission. This takes enormous processing power, more supercomputer power than will ever be available to the organization. How could they take on such a challenge?

Several years ago, someone came up with a brilliant solution. Break the data down into small chunks and send them to hundreds of thousands of home computers. Instead of running screen savers, the computer owners would allow their machines to process the data when their computers were sitting idle. The data would then be sent back to SETI to be assembled and further processed.

A similar process is already taking place around stuttering. With hundreds of thousands of consumers working to solve the problem, and with the Internet as the means to share their experiences, we now have the firepower

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to solve what so many people have thought was an unsolvable problem. That's because *everyone* is empowered to be part of the solution. Coming up with answers is no longer the exclusive domain of the professionals. It's an effort that involves all of us.

For example, look how many people are on Stuttering Chat and how many participate on some other Internet forum relating to stuttering. Because of this huge dialogue taking place, ordinary people are doing extraordinary things. They're writing books. They're coming up with suggestions for therapy. And they're helping researchers and speech pathologists to be better informed.

At the 2002 annual conference of the National Stuttering Association, we held the First Joint Symposium for Researchers and Consumers. This meeting, which was two years in the making, is, as far as I know, the first such gathering in the history of stuttering research. It was designed to facilitate interactions between and among researchers and consumers on the subject of fluency disorders. For a day and a half, fifty scientists and clinicians, along with fifteen consumer advocates, discussed the current and future state of stuttering research and drafted ideas for future studies. This is the kind of cooperation I'm talking about.

There have also been a number of speech professionals who have been intimately involved with the stuttering community through the Internet since the early 90s and through attending NSA chapter meetings and conferences. It's been interesting to see how much they've grown and how their points of view have been transformed as a result.

## *HERE ARE SOME THINGS YOU CAN DO*

You may be saying, "Great! But what can *I* do?" How can I start dismantling my stuttering hexagon. How can I start getting past my speech blocks? How can I get to where speaking is fun?"

For openers, start reading. Not just about stuttering. Broaden your reading to all those areas that have to do with who you are as a human being.

Start being a good observer. Notice the subtle ways in which the way you function as a person affects your speech. Start asking questions like — "Suppose I didn't block in this situation, what might happen?" Don't stop with the obvious answers like, "Well, if I didn't block, I might stutter." Go deeper. What else might happen if you really showed up as the full version of who you are? Keep a journal.

Get out of your comfort zone. Experiment. Try new things. Remember, there's a good chance that the answers may not be under the street light, but in the dark where you have to feel your way around.

Get involved in programs that promote your growth as a person, like the

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Landmark Forum, or Toastmasters, or Speaking Freely (Speaking Circles) .

Get to know your stuttering behavior in intimate detail, so you can duplicate it on purpose, down to the finest degree. Know what you're doing when you block. Don't allow yourself to go unconscious. Work with a speech professional, if you need to, in order to get a handle on this.

And for Pete's sake, get on the Internet if you're not there already, and start dialoguing with people who have an enormous amount of wisdom and insight to share.

I'd like to conclude with a couple of e-mails posted on the neurosemantics Internet forum on stuttering\* by several list members. These are people who have been profoundly affected by the discussions that have unfolded here.

The first is from Robert Strong in New Zealand.

*I would like to share a little of my realizations that would have been somewhat foreign to me 6 months ago. I, too, and probably most of you out there, wanted to consciously be rid of stuttering. I now realise that just letting go of my stutter would have left the same old me, just without a stutter. If I had "fixed" my stutter, life may have been easier, but I would have been in the same model of my world. It is myself that I have needed to heal. Healing myself enables me to change my life for the better... I have started a new journey that I didn't realise was even there for me. And.... here's the EPIC part about it... the stutter leaves me as a consequence. Yes... it just leaves of it's own free will. Wow! I don't know about you guys and gals, but that bloooows me away.*

And finally, this piece from Prasun Sonwalkar. At the time, Prasun was a graduate student in England.

*This [neuro-semantics Internet] group is really making a difference to people's lives. It's amazing how technology facilitates this. I have progressed quite a distance, and have reached the point where I realize that effective speaking is so much more than just NOT stuttering! Since the last month or so, I have just not been caring whether I stutter or not, it is not that big a bother as it was some time ago. John's 'free fall' concept [in an earlier e-mail, I compared letting go and speaking to bailing out of a plane] is so useful, and when I free fell in the situations I earlier consistently avoided, things turned out real cool. In general there is so much less tension, feverishness, worry...maybe the real me is coming out. The most important thing of course is my own relationship with myself, which has improved vastly. What would we do without this group!*

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\* <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/neurosemanticsofstuttering>

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Ladies and gentlemen, big changes are now taking place in the way we view stuttering. It's happening now. There are thousands participating in the transformation.

Won't you join in the fun?

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PART

6

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A THREE-YEAR RECOVERY STORY

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## PART 6

This three-year email correspondence with Andrew Reis is a long read, but I think you'll find it enlightening. In particular, you'll see how important it is to keep a clear intention when the going gets rough, and how considerable patience is often required to make significant change.

Although I do formal coaching sessions with people who stutter, I was not functioning with Andrew in any official capacity during this period. I was simply responding as an interested friend. Nonetheless, the dialogue demonstrates the usefulness of having a knowledgeable third party who can offer an outsider's perspective of what's going on.

This kind of feedback – whether it comes from fellow members on a discussion list or from an experienced professional or from a knowledgeable friend – stops you from being limited by your own subjectivity. This is especially true when you feel demoralized because change is happening slowly or not at all. The fact is, if your intention is clear and you continue to make an effort, you will eventually see progress.

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## ANDREW'S RECOVERY

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### A 3-year email correspondence

17 Nov 1998

Hi John, Andrew here.

New challenges have developed for me. I have to continuously watch where I'm coming from. I have gotten very fluent. Recently I have been too hard on myself. No room for errors which is dangerous, and I've seen this. When you're under this intense pressure, your intentions are to hide from yourself. You use tricks to run away from yourself, for yourself has become like a strict school principal.

I have noticed this and felt my hexagon change last night. I asked myself to change it by spelling out to myself what I was doing. When the fear hit, although I was still doing fine, my centering was not correct and I ended up trying to practise in real life situations. I felt that by this measure I was masking my true self again.

In real life situations I need the conviction of what I really want to say to carry the words through. I have thought up a nice little analogy. It applies to the McGuire method in terms of attacking feared words. You have to get yourself and the person you are talking to on your side against the word by being honourable, not the word and person you are talking to against you by trying to project yourself as someone you're not (here we get your analogy of the two circles).

It all comes down to not losing sight of the acceptance. I was coming from my lower self through my ego expanding with the fluency. Now I feel redeemed. I have now changed everything in support of fluency, rather in support of not losing my fluency. I wish I could come to see you in person in Dublin [I was scheduled to run a workshop there], but financial situations are not the best at present. Take care.

Thank you for your time,  
Andrew

7 Dec 1998

*[I had asked Andrew if I could use in my book some of what he'd written to me in emails.]*

Hi John, Permission granted, I would consider it an honour. Since I last wrote to you I have been understanding some interesting insights into my holding back behavior.

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Firstly, when a person holds back, speech is the representation of this. When a person decides to let go, the attitude changes, and it's this that breaks through the blocks. I have had some turbulence recently, but I'm glad for the experience. I now know that every so often this will happen, I'm getting to see now why I'm blocking, I know I must be near the end of the fight.

Maybe fight is the wrong word. Maybe it should be enlightenment. What I have experienced recently is like a snake shedding its skin, with regards to Dave's course (i.e., The McGuire Programme). If you don't shed the old skin quick enough you'll relapse. You need to change the goal posts and get into a new skin, which supports and encourages recovery from stammering even if you feel you've recovered. That's the challenge. That's the border that has to be crossed.

A lot of people like myself have relapsed because I tried to recover in an old skin. It doesn't work because in the old skin the Hexagon is not positioned for recovery. I still get stuck asking people of different nationalities questions. I'm ok with "What's the right time?"... "Can you tell me the right time?"... "Do you have the right time?" But "Got the right time?" is still a major challenge. It never used to be, but I would frequently have to repeat myself because foreign people learn phrases, none of which include "Got the right time". When I approach them I know they will not understand what I'm saying which causes the confusion, which leads to panic. I will persevere, though.

Everything else is fine, looking forward to Christmas.

Andrew

7 Jan 1999

Hi John,

Hope you had a pleasant Christmas and will have a prosperous new year. I had a good Christmas for a change. Usually I get speech blocks in plentiful supply. This year I felt fear speaking again but wanted to focus more in just talking and letting go.

I had a feeling of this when I worked recently. At work I didn't really have a fear-based block in two months – the total duration of my seasonal employment. I have learned new things recently. Firstly acceptance. When you truly accept you don't need a speech therapy technique, such a technique can dramatically help someone who is prepared to see himself for what he really is. When you're prepared to let go and speak, you don't hold back when using a technique because it becomes part of who you are. When one is in denial, then just like he/she perpetuates stammering by fighting it, so he/she fights any speech technique they learn. It becomes just a waste of time. Recently, although I knew I would have to watch closely, I have fallen

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into the denial stage of "[I have] everything to lose, and the world will end if I block," and of course you block more then.

This week I was attempting to make street contacts but was trying so hard to be fluent. There was no room to breathe, no encouragement. I was not on my side. What happened? Block after block after block not handled with dignity. But how could I have dignity when I was trying to deny that I was a stammerer?

I remembered the words of Sheehan and Van Riper: voluntary stammer and the truth shall set you free. But voluntary stammering is no good if you are trying to deny that you stammer. I had to totally accept and perceive the world truly from the point of view of someone who stammers.

Do you know what? I felt comfortable. I accepted it. I remember Jack Menear saying that, ok you stammer but you've completed some good adventures, you're healthy, you've a lot of things to be proud of. Focusing on these things greatly helped and liberated me. I felt great and stopped holding back in front of my friend (another McGuire student). Suddenly I knew who I was and knew what I had to do. My speech returned to being block free. My hexagon had changed dramatically almost in an instant, and my speech improved beyond recognition.

I have been de-motivated recently as far as street contacts are concerned, Doing them began to get on my nerves. It was like I couldn't relax. Wherever I turned, I had to prove I could talk. If I felt fear, it became more of a chore. And like stammering, I was no longer happy because I couldn't relax. This had an adverse affect on me, too.

Thank you for you time John. I know this is a rather lengthy email, but I think it's important to air one's feelings and not hold back.

Look forward to hearing from you.

Andrew

Hi John,

Whilst in a lecture this popped into my mind – "In order to stop resisting stammering, any negative perceptions of the reality of stammering must change [if you are to see it in] a more positive light. Resistance remains because of the terrifying reality that stammering has for the majority of stammerers."

Love your ideas on connections. To make connections, however, one must get past the initial rush of fear which [pressures] us to not reveal our stammer. Maybe this fear could be greatly reduced by following the above quote.

To connect, we have to get over the initial gorge. We need a bridge (speech techniques, acceptance, whatever) to be able to connect. Once

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connection is made, the strength of the frequency has to be such that it fills any looming gorges so that blocks become less fear based and easy to speak through.

I can see it clearly. The connection is the most important thing for it is communication, itself, and getting over the initial gorge that is the key. The greater number of connections, the easier it is to grasp the feeling of letting go.

The letter you wrote to me saying that costal breathing can be an aid to experience the total feeling of letting go was the key. I played around with that for a while, and after not blocking at work for the total duration of my employment while I was blocking elsewhere, this experience made me think, why is this so? Now I feel I have the answer. The signals I made with my fellow employees were strong enough to pick up even when my frequency was beginning to fade a little (beginning to hold back again).

When I speak to people and block, it's my reaction to the block that people react to, not the actual block. I always thought that their reactions further signified that stammering was a real oddity and increased my resistance and continued the blockage. The block signifies a temporary loss of connection, but a smile and dignity to let the other person know that connection has not been lost is very helpful. As I now see, connection is it. I know I'm getting closer to answering my own behavior. It's being willing to come out of my protective shell and expand my comfort zone, but at least now I have the choice about whether or not I want to be able to speak or not.

One final point about connection. The initial connection is vital because it's this connection that will set the frequency of all other connections. I now see some truth in the phrase "First impressions count." (Laughs out loud). What I must be prepared to think before this first encounter, and resolve to continue to think during every new day, is that I must be prepared to realize myself despite stammering. [I must be willing to] put it to one side and keep it to one side. With this attitude all connections will reflect Andrew Rees the person rather than Andrew Rees the stuttering person.

Thanks for you time, John. I could go on all day. Maybe I should write things down.

I do, however, portray all my ideas to you.

Take care.

Andrew Rees

John,

My recent realization is that I'm already a fluent speaker. I'm like every other fluent person. There's no need for struggle, and even if the struggle happens, I know why. What a feeling. When I block now, it's because I'm

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treating the word as a performance. But it shouldn't be a performance. I shouldn't have to struggle when I speak. I tell myself that and that the word I might block on is only word. I'm beginning to stop the struggle and see the word for what it is.

About connections, I'm beginning to see that the fight to be fluent is what's causing me to be disfluent. I connect with the image that other people expect – a fluent speaker when I communicate with them. They don't expect someone who stammers.

I am a fluent person on my own. Therefore, I am like them. So I tell myself don't struggle to speak like them. I remember your golf swing analogy. Thanks for that, it was magic, the total feeling of letting go.

I get this feeling (letting go) but it comes in waves. I'm learning to remind myself of it and to internalize it more. I'm beginning to learn to see myself as someone who occasionally stammers rather than [be] a stammerer. Do you know what? The world was a different place today.

I have to not let the performance mode kick in now that I'm aware of it. And that's a start. Once you start to think "Hey I'm doing pretty damn good" it'll start the stress and performance instincts again. They are instincts at this tender stage until I reverse them, It's taken six years to internalize them. It will take time to reverse them. I've enjoyed being me today for a change, and as each new connection takes over and talks for me, I like myself more.

I'm at a tender stage, but now I understand the process more clearly. It just feels so good not to have to struggle anymore. Six years is a long time thinking I had to fight to talk. The ironic thing is that I have always been a fluent speaker, two selves running in parallel.

I know it's another lengthy email John but I felt the need to express my feelings to you. Maybe you can identify with what I've written.

Take care, Thanks for your time.

2/7/99

Hi John,

Just a short mail. Today hasn't been the best of days. The weather isn't great here, maybe that hasn't helped. Totally slipped back into the old mentality today. I've felt better, it's as if my happiness in life is determined by whether I can speak or not. This only increases my resistance to stammering (holding back).

I think I know the benefits of expanding the comfort zone. By doing this you begin to attach the happiness you get from having talked well to other things. Therefore, your happiness isn't entirely determined by the way you speak. I tried to imagine what letting go would feel like today but the more I tried to say words, the more vulnerable I felt, and consequently

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really stammered. Maybe I block because I don't want people to know how much I really hate myself because of the reality of stammering.

I don't think I felt really focused last week. I felt that I had the answer to it. This [triggered my performance mode], and I went back to square one. However, I do know why and have kept the insights I gained last week. Being tired doesn't help. When I spoke, I was trying to go in three directions – whether to heavily coastal breathe, or to try not to look at the words as a performance or to try not to stammer. Talk about short circuit.

I hope you don't mind me e-mailing you again so soon John, but I had to write this out. Maybe there are some clues in what I wrote. Today I have hated myself.

Thanks.

*(Written to a stuttering discussion list)*

4 Feb 1999

Re: gee I like feelings

Hi all. Just a brief mail. This continues on my previous lines about connections. Speech, isn't it great (laughs). Feelings, aren't they great? Can't they fuel emotions to project yourself into what your saying?

I'm trying to live all my feelings now and flow with life's waves, the peaks and troughs. Before, I always tried to be happy and would cover all my feelings. I didn't want to feel sad. I didn't want to feel anger. I haven't really cried in years, I don't want to feel plastic anymore (like the folk who stand outside Disney stores and say "Have a nice now" with a painted smile, yuk.)

I miss not crying. I have missed myself, for I am a collection of feelings. I want to feel alive again, I want to feel sad, I want to cry, I want to love, I want to laugh for there is a time for everything. I'm human, not a waxwork model. Therefore, now that I'm beginning my journey into myself, I don't need to block these feelings.

If you are blocking these feelings from yourself, you will block them from everyone else. And how do we communicate our feelings? Through our speech. In my opinion one has to begin to consider accepting these feelings and living them, actually feel what it is like to cry, feel sadness. For these feelings WILL pass as does life. When we accept these feelings, we don't need to block them out and they become valuable.

I had to stop seeing my speech as a performance, and have to be prepared to communicate my feelings. I feel by doing this my feelings become a valuable asset which I can PROJECT as opposed to hold back.

Think about it.

Bye.

Feb 1999

Hi John, learning to trust my feelings more and more each day. I don't see myself as a stammerer now, which is liberating in itself. I'm learning more to see myself as someone who occasionally blocks out his feelings as to not experience them. It all ties in. Now I just ride with the impulse of what I'm feeling and the words are just kind of happening. It's like I'm jumping into the context of the situation with my feelings. I'm using my feelings to communicate rather than my words.

This I think is a major step forward for me. When I do stutter, I don't care as much because I know what I'm doing and am willing to explore why I might have blocked. I feel a different person already, but I do have further to go because it's only recently I have understood that I'm actually blocking out my feelings. I have a lot more, which I have written down. Maybe when you have time we could discuss this matter in more depth.

Thanx John. Bye

12 Feb 1999

Hi, I would like to share my experiences with people on the course. Briefly, I have recently engaged myself in Buddhist teachings. I have meditated before because I think thought mastery is ONE way to let stammering die.

Recently I went along to a Buddhist temple. I found the experience rather liberating. It was like going to an airport, putting your baggage onto the carrying belt but not picking it up. I was left with no heavy baggage to carry around with me. Of course you accumulate the baggage again during the course of the week because our western ideologies are conducive to this.

We meditated on DEATH. This may sound rather depressing but it's ultimate liberation from the western mindset. This mindset is what stammering is borne out from, the need to control, need to accumulate. If we can't control, will our ability to accumulate be hindered etc.? This takes more discussion, but I'm briefly flying over it. The meditation on DEATH is necessary to remind ourselves that we are going to DIE. There is no way to prevent this, as we cannot stop our bodies from decaying.

When we remind ourselves of this we begin to understand the reality of our death, and stop BLOCKING this reality. This is a good question perhaps for people who HAVE recovered from stammering. Do you agree that we block out the reality of our death, and don't we think we are immortal? Do you continue to block out this reality? THIS IS THE

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ULTIMATE IN HOLDING BACK, because we are not living in reality. We think we are immortal. Therefore, we think we need to control and accumulate. But if we look at the REALITY, don't all the things we worry about pale in significance? We are only here for a short time. Depending on your beliefs, we may have many lives, but even for those who believe there is nothing after death, ISN'T THIS LIBERATION ITSELF? I think so. Just think about it. Don't try to control what I have said. Let it wash over you.

Take care.

4 Mar 1999

I sent you four mails on your AOL address. I thought perhaps you had taken a vacation. I have the flu at the present time. I'm beginning to realize that this world is as much mine as anyone else's and that I can do whatever I want to, within legal boundaries, of course.

I did a presentation to my seminar class recently, and beforehand, whenever fear thoughts about it came up, I attempted to let the thoughts go. As I result I felt nervous but accepted this. I didn't try to control the perceived reality. Initially I really stammered even though I tried to slide through the blocks, but after a while I began to notice my shallow breaths. I tried to have fun with the blocks, incidentally your section about voluntary stammering really helped.

Then I began to stop being afraid. I tried to stay in touch with how it felt. On this occasion I didn't get to the stage where I was fully immersed in what I was reading, but that will come. After the presentation was finished I tried to internalize the picture of myself during the presentation. I didn't feel any regret or self-hate, I would do another one anytime, I felt integrity for myself, nothing but respect true grit and character. I was proud of myself.

That's it for now. I have so much to tell but respect that you are very busy. I'm becoming a member of the NSA this week.

Take care. Bye

3/8/99

Just had to share this with you John. Recently I have done street contacts, and what I have found has really opened my eyes. When I went back to concentrating on trying to get the words out just purely out of performance I struggled and fought. When I focused on the connection and held a positive reaction in my mind about the emotional connection the words just happened with no fuss or bother. The way I look at it is people don't expect me to stammer if they have no previous knowledge of me. I used to think that even strangers were waiting for me to stammer (laughs). Now I

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see that it's ok to speak without this fuss and bother, it's ok.

When I get the feeling that I'm going to stammer now I do a number of things. I need to write this down. I try to look at the word initially and realize that it's just a word that I can say. I try not to identify with the panic. I accept it's there, but I now know that I have a choice to follow it or not. I try to look at what I wanted to block out. I know you're right about wanting to block something out, and it's a marvelous realization.

These days I try to be as natural as I can, and live my feelings. It's a great feeling to have this knowledge. I'm beginning to see myself in reality. I know what has been going on for years. The stammering mentality has blocked everything else out. My head has been full of trying to escape from something, which has just been keeping everything in a self-sustaining loop.

I know I'm not perfect and try not to be although these footsteps are tender at this stage. At the moment I know I have many flaws and feel new to this game of life. I know that I have the creative powers to transform myself into anything I wish. I guess what I'm trying to say is that I have not felt as balanced as this for many many years. I'm happy being alive.

All the best.

15 Mar 1999

Re: Jack Nicholson

Hi John, something I have been thinking recently. I used to think I was the way I was because I stammered. Now I know that I stammer because of the way I am. This is very liberating.

Recently I spent the weekend with a girl I know. I put the stammering aside and for the first time in years every minute was an adventure. I haven't felt like this since before I started to chronically block. There were times however when I began to dwell again and this brought back more blocks. When I let my mind be free again though and didn't try to control it, my speech was fine. It will take time for this tendency to dwell to diminish, but I know what's going on now and stammering doesn't hold the same mystical fear for me as it once did.

Recently I saw a Jack Nicholson film. I remember what you said about observing people who you thought were good speakers. I think Jack N is the most laid back eloquent speaker I have ever heard. I like to listen to him talk and imagine what must be like to talk like that. I have been observing a lot recently. I know I have a clear picture of the total feeling of letting go. When is your next workshop in the U.K.?

Take care.

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3/25/99

Thank you for your input regarding my website. I agreed and amendments have taken place to the site. Did you get the chance to browse through some of the activities? I have created another five links. I do not know yet what I will use to link my page up to though. I know it's only a small site but if it can possibly reach a person who is not part of any forum community, I think it will be justified. I have applied to all the major search engines to advertise the site, too. I do, however, need to make some adjustments to make the text appear more presentable.

I continue making observations. Last night I watched the U.S. defense secretary talking live to the world's press about Kosovo. I kept an open mind and tried to experience what he was experiencing live to the world's press.

I don't look at stammering in the same way any longer, I'm beginning to lose interest because I feel I understand much better. This understanding has quenched the fear surrounding it. If I stammer now I try to internalize it and make the experience part of me. The challenge has been to replace the stammering mentality with constructive activities. My conscious thinking hours used to be dominated by thoughts about stammering. It's like the world has opened up. I guess I'm free from the inside rather than trying to be free just by changing my speech. I see similar elements to your insights and Jack Menear's.

Thanks

Date: Tue, 6 Apr 1999

Subject: Re: New adventures

Hi John,

Over the weekend I experienced some interesting insights, I thought I would share them with you. I took a telephone [call] from my girlfriend who is in Milan. I did feel the old control and anticipation thoughts entering my mind at first. Then I did something interesting. I asked myself what I really thought about what she was saying, not what I thought she wanted to hear, or what I should say in order to not stammer.

This I felt was a major breakthrough because I just spoke. I asked myself how I felt and represented myself verbally for the first time in YEARS with no hint of holding back. I knew what I wanted to say and said it. To be able to do this, however, I know it was important to have had the costal breathing experience to be able to know what letting go is like. Observing again was a critical factor because I had an idea of the total feeling of letting go.

Suddenly it felt like I was in another dimension. No longer was I caught under the veil of the stammering mentality and no longer was I speaking out of performance. After the call I didn't feel great because I hadn't

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stammered. I just wrote everything out and felt I understood the feeling of letting go more.

I didn't feel blocked. It was me communicating for the first time in years. It was like I had learned how to surf the waves rather than continually falling into the sea and getting caught. I did have blocks but here is the interesting thing. I didn't really pay much attention to them. I was too interested in representing my own thoughts and feelings. For the first time in ages what I wanted to say was more important than how I said it. When I did stammer I quickly got back on my surfboard and caught the next wave rather than waiting for it in anticipation and letting it beat me under the ocean.

I can't tell you what it felt like, I feel like I have an even better picture of the total feeling of letting go. Doing this also greatly improved the connection I made with my girl friend. The words just happened. I didn't have to struggle. I went with the flow of the feeling, and the words just surfed.

Thanks for your time John.

Fri, 16 Apr 1999

Subject: Re: Sine wave metaphor

Hi John, I now understand what you meant when you said that I would experience many lows. I go through a trough every couple of weeks. I feel I know why though. When I feel as though I have made a breakthrough, I feel this has to be maintained by performing. Consciously I know that it's precisely because I have let go of the performance element and allowed my feelings to surface that my speech has returned to nature's way. But my reactions to stammering have become part of my everyday instinct reactions. I am aware as to why I get downs, and I'm quite relaxed about it because I feel I know why. Usually when I can put my finger on it, the confusion ceases.

Recently it has been like I have become another person, entering into a different mentality. But having lived with a mentality, which created the stammering for many years, I know that I slip back from time to time. This exactly fits what you described as the sine wave metaphor [*i.e. - a wave having highs and lows.*]

Bye for now

18 Apr 1999

Hi, this kind of continues from my last mail to the group regarding speech. My last mail was "Gee I like feelings". Over the last few months my mentality regarding speech has entered another dimension. Before, even having encountered years of struggle (before the McGuire course)

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I still was in the dark about the acceptability of feelings. In my opinion feelings make us who we are. I will come back to this.

Recently I experienced the total feeling of letting go for the first time in a great number of years (developed a chronic blocking problem at the age of 15). The experience made speaking fun. It was as if I had drawn a straight line on a page with a ruler and my words followed this line. Finally I had direction. I knew what I wanted to say without worrying about not being nice, performance fears being too aggressive etc. I was being me.

Later after the telephone conversation I didn't feel elation, I didn't feel great about having spoken fine. Why should I? I have always been able to speak this way, but I choose to interfere with nature. I just wrote the experience out and will learn from it. What got me this experience was the fact that I was prepared to communicate how I felt. My speech took on a whole new perspective. No longer was I afraid of blocking or trying too hard to speak. I just described how I felt, the words just happened. This is a starting point for me. We all get ups and downs but it's being prepared to experience negative feelings and not block them out that is important. What I'm trying to say is – use the McGuire method to experience YOU, not to perform. You are the person behind the words. Make them express what you feel. Words are not the enemy.

Bye

Fri, 23 Apr 1999

Re: Rhythm

Hi, just thought I would share my recent observations with the group about my speech. I'm learning guitar, and I'm taught by a very experienced guitarist. Today I learned a strum without a plectrum to a Bob Marley song. The strum is rather complex. I was shown the motion and what do with my hand but couldn't get it to sound right, in fact it sounded awful.

The more I thought about it the more tense I became and the more my tutor thought I was going to break a string. STOP I was told. FEEL THE RHYTHM and let go. When my guitar tutor played it sounded beautiful, I wondered how? He told me that he wasn't thinking about the motion of his hand or the way his hand was positioned. He just followed the rhythm and let go. He was actually in the rhythm. More importantly the rhythm GUIDED HIM.

When I began to do the same my strumming sounded 100% better, I became immersed in what I was playing rather than trying to get what I was playing right. Change the word "playing" in the last sentence for "saying" and I think we come up with some interesting facts.

Throughout the lesson I got caught in my old mentality of trying to

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anticipate and control what I was saying or about to say. I wasn't letting go and allowing my feelings to guide me just like I wasn't letting the rhythm guide me musically.

What happened? Unconsciousness.

I was either in the past or the future BUT NEVER REALLY IN THE MOMENT. I wasn't immersed in the rhythm of who I am, because who I am guides me when I talk, just like when I play, the rhythm of the music takes over.

I think it's important for McGuire graduates to grasp this. You can be the most mechanically fluent person in the world but still not know you haven't progressed past the stammering mentality.

It may be important to adopt a kind of performance mentality at the beginning of therapy, but it's important that you use the technique to LET GO and explore yourselves. I think a lot of successful graduates have moved past this performance stage and have actually adopted the mentality of a fluent speaker, WHICH IS CRUCIAL.

Those who have not let go like I have done in the past become lost, don't know what they feel, therefore don't really know what to say and relapse because what they have got (fluency) doesn't fit the setting, it doesn't fit into who they are because they haven't felt who they are. Trying to keep fluency when you don't allow yourselves to experience YOUR RHYTHMS I think is why some people relapse. This is certainly true for me.

Bye

28 Apr 1999

Re: Job Interview

Hi John,

Had a job interview today and it's fair to say that I blocked my feelings throughout. My speech was very disrupted. After the interview it was hard not to feel some embarrassment and sadness.

However I remained positive like I always do and tried to learn from the experience. It's fair to say that I cocooned myself throughout the whole interview and slipped back to my familiar attempts to block my feelings.

I wasn't aware that I was having feelings. I looked back and thought wow, what happened? The interesting thing was that I know that I caused it. This is comforting because in the past I thought it was down to sorcery or a demonic force. Knowing this makes it a whole lot better.

>> *Once you realize that the holding back of feeling lies at the heart of the speech block, you can make a CONSCIOUS decision to stay open when the negative feelings roll in.*

I thought long and hard about this statement because it interested me. During the interview I hadn't made a conscious decision to stay open and

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say what I actually felt like saying that would be a true indication of how I felt. I was trying not to stammer. I realize this will take a long time, maybe years, because it took years to get here but over the last few months I have felt a freedom like I haven't felt for a long time. I'm prepared to wait, learn and observe.

Bye

28 Apr 99

Andrew,

>> *Had a job interview today and it's fair to say that I blocked my feelings throughout. My speech was very disrupted. After the interview it was hard not to feel some embarrassment and sadness. However I remained positive like I always do and tried to learn from the experience.*

Ah yes, I know these experiences well. This is how you learn. I don't know how much you've reviewed and processed this experience so far, but here are some questions you might pose to yourself:

1. What was at stake in this interview? Not just the job, but what were your personal issues that were at stake? List them out.
  2. Did this situation remind you of earlier situations in your life? (for reference, see my article, "Anatomy of a Block.") In order to get a handle on this, you have to replay the interview in your mind a number of times and as you do, continually broaden the number of things you observe.
  3. What did the interviewer NOT get to know about you because you held back?
  4. What might you have been holding back?
  5. What did you notice about your other behaviors, apart from your speech?
  6. Did you see this person as an authority figure? And were you trying to please him or her?
  7. What aspects of your REAL self did not come through because you held back?
  8. If you DID allow yourself to experience your feelings during the interview, what might have you been experiencing?
  9. What kind of attitude did you perceive the interviewer had? Judgmental? Supportive? Etc. What verbal or nonverbal cues allowed you to reach this conclusion?
  10. What was the setting like in which the interview took place? Was the interviewer in an obvious power position? Were you in an obvious subordinate position?
  11. How were you feeling that day before you went into the interview? What kinds of things took place? What were your thoughts like? Were you holding back about other things? Were your thoughts preprogramming
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you to hold back? In short, what kind of a hexagon did you have when you went in for the interview?

12. What could you do if you had an opportunity to do the same interview over again to make the situation easier for you to express yourself in?

Got the idea? There may be other questions that come to mind as well.

You have the perfect attitude for working through this. So give it a shot and see what comes up.

Regards,

John

30 Apr 1999

Re: Job Interview

Hi John, Listed a number of things as you advised and feel a lot clearer, although I feel what I have discovered is only the tip of the iceberg.

The weeks before the interview I was blocking my feelings, this is why my inner harmony was disrupted. Before this period I was slipping into highs and lows but at least I was getting highs (sine wave). Recently however I didn't know why but I was not in touch with myself and almost felt neutral, neither alive nor dead. It strikes me now that why I felt like this was because I was holding back.

I always wondered what "holding back" meant. In my experience it means not allowing yourself to feel negative feelings. By not allowing yourself to experience these negative feelings you cannot open up to the corresponding highs of the sine wave, I think this is becoming a lot clearer to me. It strikes me that one can block one's feelings without talking. Most of the blocking which occurs during speech is the result of nonverbal inner inabilities to flow with how one feels. This is, I feel, part of the reason why I blocked persistently during the interview. What was happening with my speech was just an extension of what I was doing inside.

Interviews are also challenging situations because you have to play a role, and this can be challenging for someone who needs to get in touch with how they feel, The role can almost mask what the person feels, unless inner feelings at the moment of the interview are acceptable to projecting a favourable image of oneself.

Another thing I feel I have learned is that if you don't allow yourself to experience negative feelings one can create conflict which prolongs the holding back, The more you try not to experience negative feelings the more of them you actually have. I think this is right. Two nights ago I felt down, and this stayed with me all day. Everything I saw, I saw through the glasses of someone who was down. It occurred to me however that I wasn't down. I was holding back from feeling it. I was on the water's edge

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afraid to jump into the cold water, afraid of the initial shock of the icy water. If, however, I just jumped in, the shock would hit but would diminish as my body got used to temperature.

In the evening I suddenly realized what I was doing and let myself feel what I was holding back from. I got onto a bus and the way I spoke mirrored how I felt and this was ok. After about half an hour of really getting down with the negative feelings I had opened up to the possibility of experiencing the peak of the sine wave. My head felt clear and I felt good.

I still have a lot more to think about with regards to the interview but this I feel is a positive start. Thank you for your time, John.

6 May 1999

Hi, I don't know if you got my last email or whether you're on vacation. The content of the last mail was about what I observed about myself during the weeks before the interview. I commented on the fact that much of the holding back that takes place occurs when you're not talking. If you have days when you really stammer, this is just an extension of what you're doing inside.

I was holding back how I felt for a number of weeks before the interview and that hindered [me]. The way I spoke was just an external manifestation of what I was doing internally. When you hold back how you feel, it prolongs the whole episode. I also commented on the fact that one day last week I realized what I was doing (holding back internally) and allowed myself to experience the negative feelings. My words echoed the negativity for a while until I experienced the upward motion of the sine wave. The negative feelings passed but only because I let myself feel them. This exposed me to the peak of the sine wave.

I have had problems at this end with the email, so forgive me if you did get the last mail.

I have been interested recently on the point at where one actually speaks. One challenge is to stay conscious. I know this, but what I have been challenged by recently is looking for a point of reference. Having blocked myself through my thoughts and feelings for a very long time, it is difficult to know what I feel about anything.

I remember your statement in "How to conquer your fears" [the previous title of this book] which said that at about my age (23) you didn't know what you felt about a lot of things. I'm at the same stage and finding words to express this confusion at the point of speaking is challenging. However, I believe this to be the building stage. It's up to me to rebuild my life in the way I want to. I do know what I like and that's a start. I need to build up my own point of reference into something that will guide my feelings when I

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talk.

For the first time in years I can see who I am without any self-deception, and I know I'm not the person I want to be. In some respects I feel rather shallow, almost fake. I used to think I knew everything, but it turns out that I know very little about anything except stammering. A lot of everything else I feel I have blocked out.

Thanks for you time John. In a short while I would like to donate some money to the NSP [now the NSA]. This is to say thank you for all your first class advice which has taken me in another direction. As far as recovering is concerned, this direction I know is the right one, and for that I will be forever grateful.

Bye.

Andrew,

Now I have a little time to get back to you, so let me look at the issues you raised.

*>> The weeks before the interview I was blocking my feelings, this is why my inner harmony was disrupted.*

Out of curiosity, how did you know this? The way it works for me is that the bottom of my neck gets tight, which is where my emotions get blocked when I'm not letting them out.

*>> Recently however I didn't know why but I was not in touch with myself and almost felt neutral, neither alive nor dead. I strikes me now that why I felt like this was because I was holding back.*

That's good. However, in addition, you might want to take it further by exploring what you were involved with that was prompting you to hold back. Was it a personal relationship in which there were feelings you didn't want to express? If so, how were you perceiving the situation? How were you perceiving the other person? What do you believe that person was thinking? Whatever you believe, do you know this for sure, or could it be a projection?

Or perhaps you were in resistance to doing something you didn't want to do. What were the issues? Have you taken the situation apart and looked at the pieces? Hopefully, you get the idea. You have to bring all these unconscious reactions and behaviors into awareness.

*>> I always wondered what "holding back" meant. In my experience it means not allowing yourself to feel negative feelings.*

That's true. But there could be more. Some people are afraid to feel positive feelings because it makes them feel vulnerable. They are unwilling to let themselves love someone or some thing because they inevitably feel they will get hurt. So as their feeling of love deepens, so does their resistance to the feeling.

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*>> It strikes me that one can block one's feelings without talking, Most of the blocking which occurs during speech is the result of non-verbal inner inabilities to flow with how one feels.*

Again, you're right on. You can block feelings through muscle tightness. Also, be careful of abstract speech. How is a "nonverbal inner inability to flow with how one feels" translated into behaviors or actions. What happens to your mind or your body when this is going on? It is important to get in touch with the specific things you do, feel, and think when you remove yourself from the flow.

*>> Interviews are also challenging situations because you have to play a role, and this can be challenging for someone who needs to get in touch with how they feel. The role can almost mask what the person feels, unlinner feelings at the moment of the interview are acceptable to projecting a favorable image of oneself.*

True and not true. You do have to tailor what you show, at least a little, to the situation at hand. And there may be feelings that come up which seem inappropriate to the situation. This is especially true if you have feelings (as I have, though not as much as before) toward authorities in which you cast them as judges. By the same token, there is no rule that says you cannot be yourself — that is, be genuine, spontaneous, honest, etc. Our problem as people who stammer is that we grow up tailoring ourselves TOO MUCH to what we think the other person wants. We SELL OURSELVES OUT to please another person. (Even though, ironically, we make ourselves less pleasing to the other person by doing this because we're not coming across as our real self.)

*>> Another thing I feel I have learned is that if you don't allow yourself to experience negative feelings you can create conflict which prolongs the holding back. The more you try not to experience negative feelings, the more of them you actually have. I think this is right..*

Correct! You win the trip to Hawaii and the complete cookware set.

*>> After about half an hour of really getting down with the negative feelings I had opened up to the possibility of experiencing the peak o f the sine wave. My head felt clear, and I felt good.*

Another good thing to do if you have the time and the discipline (which I don't most of the time) is to write out what you're feeling. Just free associate. Let the idea and the feelings flow through you. Allow yourself to just be the scribe for what comes up.

Yet another suggestion – if you're angry at someone or something (or even if you're not) take a section of the newspaper, roll it up into a baton, put the phone book on the chair, and beat the hell out of the phone book (WHAP! WHAP! WHAP!) until the paper starts to fall apart. It's a great experience for three reasons — (1) it makes a lot of noise, (2) it forces

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you to use your body, (3) and it is destructive as the newspaper begins to shred and then fall apart. However, it's good to have a room or a basement that's insulated, so that you don't scare the neighbors half to death.

Another thing I like is, when I'm on the highway, to roll up the car windows, and yell obscenities at no one in particular, just to get my lungs working and my energy projecting outward.

*>> I commented on the fact that much of the holding back that takes place occurs when you're not talking. If you have days when you really stammer, this is just an extension of what you're doing inside.*

Good observation. In the days when you're not talking, you're probably not CONNECTING with other people. It's through the connection and the transfer of energy and emotions that you stay open.

*>> Having blocked myself through my thoughts and feelings for a very long time, it was difficult to know what I felt about anything.*

I identify with that 100%. And the only way you'll get out of that box is to put yourself in situations which push you out of your comfort zone; that is, where there is something at risk. Such things might be establishing (or breaking off) a relationship, applying for a new job, sharing a thought or feeling with someone you've been avoiding, giving up your resentment over something. If you continually stay in safe situations where nothing is at risk, you will not be providing yourself with any opportunities for change and transformation. The major challenge, then, is to go into situations where you can feel that element of risk, and in which there is no way you can anticipate the outcome. "Dancing in the void" I call it.

*>> I do know what I like, and that's a start. I need to build up my own point of reference – something that will guide my feelings when I talk. And that IS a good start.*

*>> I'm not the person I want to be. In some respects I feel rather shallow, almost fake.*

Ah, great!!! When you get to that point, then you know you're really in the game. Some people never even get to that point. They're always living in self-denial and self-delusion.

*>> I used to think I knew everything but it turns out that I know very little about anything except stammering, a lot of everything else I feel I have blocked out.*

You know more than you think. The more you find out about stammering, the more you know about life, because the problems inherent in stammering are broad and far reaching and involve the complexities of the human psyche and soul. All of the aforementioned is equally true about golf. ;-) Which is why golf is such a gratifying and at the same time, a complex and frustrating game.

*>> In a short while I would like to donate some money to the NSP,*

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Hey, great! Your support will be much appreciated. But first, have you joined the NSP so you can get the newsletter every month? If not, we'd love to have you as a member.

Well, time to take off for my 5-mile walk to the top of Twin Peaks (the highest point in San Francisco.) Have a good weekend, Andrew, and let me know how it goes.

Regards,  
John

21 May 1999

Re: update

Hi John,

>> *Out of curiosity, how did you know this? The way it works for me is that the bottom of my neck gets tight, which is where my emotions get blocked when 'm not letting them out.*

A period during this week I felt unsettled, I put it down to blocking my feelings, I looked at my behaviors and noticed I was continuously clenching my jaws. I wasn't aware of how tight I was clenching my teeth. Also during periods of holding back I tend to think out loud and identify and react to every thought that surfaces. I think of this as holding back in respect that I won't allow my thoughts to flow with how I feel, I distract myself by trying to control them and this stimulates more and more [holding back].

Of course you can't control thoughts to make them flow with how you feel. They just flow with feeling. When I allow myself to feel, the thoughts die out and the endless chatter becomes quiet. The thoughts, when I do hold back, are usually stimulated by the way I perceive the world from the perspective of someone who doesn't stammer and the reality that I don't want to embrace which is me, the stammerer. I try to imagine me in the world if I didn't stammer against the me in reality and this is why I get periods of holding back. I try to control this inner conflict.

The reality which I'm now beginning to realize thanks to your help is that, firstly, the way I perceive myself in terms of if I didn't stammer is nonsense because who I am is why I stammer. Secondly I'm beginning to see myself in reality for the first time in years by allowing myself to experience me. I hope this makes sense.

I have been dancing in the void lately. Once again this has opened new doors for me, thanks. In one situation where I reacted with spontaneity I found myself able to formulate and pronounce the word whilst feeling the semantics of it. I felt what the word represented to me.

Have a good weekend. Hope you enjoyed your hike. I have to revise hard because I'm in the middle of exams.

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Bye

Andrew,

>> *I try to imagine me in the world if I didn't stammer against the me in reality, and this is why I get periods of holding back.*

What keeps the stammering block alive is the holding back. So it will keep you more focused on what's going on under the surface if you say — "I try to imagine me in the world if I didn't hold back." Remember that stammering consists of two parts — the block and the strategies to break through or avoid the block. When you perceive a compound problem as a single, unitary problem (called stammering), it often masks and confuses what is really going on.

>> *The reality which I'm now beginning to realize thanks to your help is that, firstly, the way I perceive myself in terms of "if I didn't stammer" is nonsense because who I am is why I stammer.*

Yep.

>> *I try to control this inner conflict.*

And overcontrolling your spontaneous self is what contributes to the problem.

>> *I have been dancing in the void lately. Once again this has opened new doors for me, thanks. In one situation where I reacted with spontaneity I found myself able to formulate and pronounce the word whilst feeling the semanticsof it. I felt what the word represented to me.*

Beautiful!

>> I have to revise hard because I'm in the middle of exams .

Good luck with them.

John

9 Jun 1999

Subject: Re: Hawthorne

Hi John, the essay you wrote on the Hawthorn effect provides a lot of food for thought. I couldn't put it down. To give you my overall opinion would not do it justice. It will take time to dissect but the words "truly" and "brilliant" come to mind. I printed it right away and read it all last night. Everything is there. I will continue to feed from it for a long while yet. I feel like the boy who let go of always trying to be good and drove away in the Thunderbird! A lot of what I have been experiencing is highlighted in the essay. It's a real BIBLE.

Sunday I watched a sad movie. I knew it was sad because I had seen it before. Events have occurred in my life recently, which I have highlighted, and I have tried to let myself experience the feelings that they have

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invoked. I watched the movie and used it to feel the negative feelings that I knew would result as a consequence of the events (I broke up with my girlfriend). I cried and really let go. Experiencing the feelings hurt. I could feel something in the pit of my stomach, but I stayed with it. I have never cried like it before. I let go more than I usually would. Recently I have been discussing what has been happening to me with my parents. I told them that I hadn't cried for years. Neither had I really laughed for the same duration. (I know that other feelings are evident)

Briefly, things I have noticed. I went into a shop to sell some item of equipment. I didn't even think about stammering I was too busy trying to connect with the person, he seemed a nice chap and through making this observation I wanted to get friendly with him. Moments earlier he told me that he was verbally abused by two shoplifters and that he had threatened them with violence. This caused me to hold back. I didn't want to get on the wrong side of this guy in case he threatened me. I tried to become invisible. I didn't want to annoy him, I tried to be a GOOD BOY just like the lad in your essay.

I'm getting more and more experiences of the total feeling of letting go everyday. Sometimes when I stumble on a word this does distract me from the flow of how I feel, but it's improving all the time.

After a recent conversation with my mother I wondered how I was totally fluent with her for an hour, and then I began to hold back? Why, I wondered. I traced the conversation back and found out that I wanted to avoid thinking think about a carpet fitter who my mother briefly suggested should come down to my flat to fit a carpet. This was only briefly mentioned. I know the fitter and have negative feelings, not toward him but toward his son.

I tried to block these feeling out and this led to me holding back for two hours until my mother left. I could not process what was being said with clarity. I wasn't letting myself flow. What I feel I have learned is that I can have an acute reaction to something, which I'm not consciously aware of, and this can lead to holding back for days, sometimes even weeks and beyond. I'm beginning to free associate on paper. I have done a lot of this before.

Take care John, thanks for the wonderful essay.

Andrew

18 Jun 1999

Subject: Re: recent findings

Hi there John, did some writing last night and I am beginning to explore events that happened years ago.

>> *Brilliant! You are building a heightened awareness that will enor*

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*mously help you in addressing the problem.*

It's amazing to realize that I could have held back in a situation because of a smell or the color of a wall!! Having developed this heightened awareness, I now begin to realize the enormous extent to which the problem needs to be addressed. I do have some questions.

Firstly, when you identify what may have caused you to hold back do you write out all the feelings associated with it? How do you address it?

I have been thinking about having fears about particular words. In particular, I have a lot of difficulty saying "bye" after a telephone call. Is the block occurring on a conscious level because I'm afraid to stammer on the word? Or is it the result of a stimulus to which I'm having an acute reaction on an unconscious level?

I was thinking about speech courses, which aim at developing fluency. It struck me that these courses can help some people become fluent, but these people have no direction to what they are saying. This happened to me. I have been able to talk fine after a fluency course, but this situation was often as lonely as stammering because the words I said had no feeling. The reason was because I was still blocking my feelings internally, even though I was able to talk! People in this situation may never get in touch with who they are, even though they can speak!

Courses that only tackle feared words address stammering on a conscious level. A person might get distracted from the flow by trying to hold back a stimulus (and the feelings it brings up) which have been observed on an unconscious level. In my experience, holding back of this unconscious reaction makes me consciously aware of my speech. This is where the feared word or words kicks in. Before on a fluency course, I was still holding back but not stammering.

All for now, John. I don't underestimate the size of task in hand. It is difficult to comprehend.

Take care.

Fri, 25 Jun 1999

Re: Job Interview

Hi John,

Many more insights to comment on.

Recently had a job interview, and it went very well, not solely in terms of me being able to speak. Before, I would have measured it that way. This time, however, I measured it on the amount of ME that I let the interviewer see. I have written everything out and came to some interesting conclusions.

Firstly when asked questions about myself (motor racing obsessive), the answers I gave him were from my heart. They were more important

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than the interview, more important than anything in my life at that particular moment. My words reflected how I felt about the topic at that particular time. Stammering didn't enter my mind.

Secondly, I think what was important was that I have been allowing myself more room to breath, (Think of the young man in your Hawthorn essay who drives away in the Thunderbird). By allowing this, I see traits of my personality, which are identical to how I was before I began to chronically block some ten years ago. I didn't start to chronically block until the age of fifteen, so knowing what to look for (about the kind of person I am) has been easier than for someone who has stammered all their lives.

I had a slight block when I shook the hand of the interviewer at the end of the interview. Why I asked myself? I went through the episode again. The interview went so well I was told that I had the job. Ahhh, I thought! When I shook the interviewers hand at the beginning of the interview he was not an authority figure, at the end of the interview I was offered the job and the roles changed. That's one reason why I blocked.

Sometimes I get caught trying to challenge myself to say particular words. But now I just remind myself that we talk with our feelings, and words are just the vehicle through which these feelings are transmitted.

Started the job today. Went into work and felt free and easy (I'm naturally wicked – a side that I'm beginning to see again. Boy have I missed it!!) Sat by these two girls who were also students. Something very interesting began to happen.

At the start I was loose, but they began to talk amongst themselves, and I didn't know what they were saying. I thought they were older than they were, and I felt them to be a bit arrogant. How did I react to this? By holding back. Even though I didn't stammer when they asked me questions about me, I still felt tight.

As the initial part of the early morning went on, this got worse until it came to the point when I said to myself "I hope they don't ask me another question". They did ask another, and I was able to free myself up, explore how I felt and describe it. But it was a close shave, not in terms of the fact that I might stammer, but because, if I panicked and blocked myself out, there would be nothing to reference. During the break I introduced myself to some people and got chatting,

I went to order some toast and blocked! Why did I just do that, I asked? It turns out that that the girl who I had wanted to protect myself from was in the queue! After break I asked the girls their age and they were younger than me, and this changed everything. My hexagon totally changed. Suddenly I felt a more mature person, a person of experience compared to them. No longer did I see them as arrogant and ignorant. I felt a lot more

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comfortable. I began to open up and my words flowed easier than they had been, even though I hadn't really stammered.

John, this last week has been a tremendous one for me. I'm beginning to get more comfortable with life and enjoy almost every speaking opportunity. I like to show myself off. It's been so long since I could last say that. I know that I have many more discoveries to make, but I really am beginning to enjoy life again. I'm finding it easier to address every situation that arises, drawing on a new developing concept of who I am. I don't know how to thank you for your insights and for hanging in there. I feel you're a very dear friend, someone I have all the time in the world for.

Bye for now, Andrew

Andrew,

Absolutely fascinating email you sent. Terrific observations and speculations. I've saved all your emails, and it's fascinating to read them through and see the progress.

I'm in the process of writing another essay entitled "How to Observe" that will be added to the Public Speaking book, and after my discussion of the subject, this article will include descriptive episodes written by three other people (my "Anatomy of A Block" article will be the fourth.) I'm trying to decide what of yours I want to include, and when I do, I'll send it to you for your okay.

Once again, three cheers for doing great work!

Regards,

John

Wed, 7 Jul 1999

Hi John,

Started two jobs recently. I work all day and all evening. I am very tired most of the time, but the experience has further developed my insights.

I feel I have a good understanding why people relapse on fluency courses. And the degree that one is able to use starter devices (clenching one's jaws, tapping one's foot) is dependent on the degree of connection they have with the person they are talking to. This is interesting.

I have had to make new friends, a lot of new friends. Initially when I started the job I was pretty much in tune with how I felt but not nearly 100%. I'm at the stage now where I was as a boy when stammering was sometimes evident but not really a problem, which meant I got caught up in actually living my life instead of putting it on hold to get fluent! I was using some starter devices initially at this point (recently) but I didn't really care about this. I was more interesting in connecting and learning

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more and more about the people I was working with. The more I get to know them, the more I can assess the sort of people they are, and the easier it will be to apply my personality to them. This can only help my speech in the long run because I can develop a clearer hexagon about each individual person.

One day in the week I had an argument with one of my fellow workers, nothing serious. Here is the interesting bit. I knew I would hold back because of this and knew that my speech, when it came to break time, would be hindered. It was, but I didn't look at it in terms of speech. I didn't look at any one particular word and say, "I couldn't say that!" I didn't really care, because I knew that I was holding back and had some knowledge of why.

In one conversation I was asked if I lived alone. In the past I have had unresolved feelings about that. I perceive it to be undesirable to live alone, especially as I'm a student and students usually live seven to a house etc. There other aspects which are not important now that I have looked at. But this question and the feelings it brought up caused me to hold back through the entire break – all 15 minutes – until I looked back and saw it.

I need to get to the stage where I'm 100% connected. I feel it's the degree of connection, which determines the degree of holding back and vice versa. In some situations, not recently but in the past (2 years ago), my degree of connection would have been 5% and degree of holding back would have 95%. At this stage there is a continuous block, which is evident nearly all the time in my experience. (It's like a car on a grand prix circuit! Years ago I couldn't move the car. Now as I'm gathering momentum – developing a clearer self-concept – my car is gathering speed but does occasionally stall. But I know why it's stalling and take it to the garage and work on it.)

The boys I work with were initially very quiet, and this caused all sorts of problems for me until I looked at it. I had a perception of them (true or not) which was similar to a perception that I had about certain guys in high school. They were very intelligent and full of wit, and I admired this. They were always laughing, and even though stammering wasn't a problem for me, I could never trust them. I wanted to get on their good side. I wanted to try to become invisible to them so I acted the clown in front of them. I tried to make them laugh. I always thought that if I did, then they would look at me as fun and so would not comment about me.

The people I work with are quiet but laugh and are witty. I began to hold back in the same way I did in high school. I took it upon myself to be funny, but this was holding back in itself. Over the weekend I wasn't happy. I am naturally witty and funny, anyway but this wasn't me, I felt that there was a danger of them losing respect for me altogether!

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I looked at many things and came up with the above realization. I knew what I was holding back, and this served to bind me together into a more compact parcel. This week I have trusted what has come up in conversations and have not tried to control every minute. I respect them as individuals, and in doing so, this has been mirrored back to me. I have tried to keep in touch with long-term aims, and this has set a direction for me.

All for now, John. Thanks for your comments. They mean so much to me. My university account has finished for the summer, so my email address is temporarily suspended. However, if you do wish to reply, could you do so using 51775@Yahoo.com

Have a great summer Andrew

Subject: new email address

Hi John,

Have some more interesting insights and have been really studying your Hawthorn essay. I must say some of your discoveries are absolutely mind blowing and 100% accurate! The essay is priceless, and I feel very lucky to have a copy. Thanks very much. I'm going to prepare something (a short draft) about my recent discoveries, namely starting two jobs. Your insights and direction I have absorbed from your work have liberated me even when my speech has been hindered recently.

More later. Take care. a

Andrew,

I have a moment to reply to your last letter. Several things caught my eye.

*>> The more I get to know them the more I can assess the sort of people they are and the easier it will be to apply my personality to them. This can only help my speech in the long run because I can develop a clearer hexagon about each individual person.*

A good way to look at it. It's something I hadn't thought of.

*One day in the week I had an argument with one of my fellow workers, nothing serious. Here is the interesting bit, I knew I would hold back because of this and knew that my speech when it came to break time would be hindered. It was, but I didn't look at it in terms of speech. I didn't look at any one particular word and say, "I couldn't say that!" I didn't really care because I knew that I was holding back and had some knowledge of why.*

Right on! It's interesting how we begin to see things once we know what to look for. It's also interesting to see how your perceptions change when

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you substitute "holding back" for "stammering."

*>> now as I'm gathering momentum (developing a clearer self concept) my car is gathering speed but does occasionally stall. But I know why it's stalling and take it to the garage and work on it.*

It's perfectly okay that your car periodically stalls. What is important is not perfection, but building awareness of what's going on. The more awareness you have, the less the holding back will occur, because you'll be quicker to see what you should avoid doing that leads to the holding back. It's like with the two young girls you talked about in your last letter. If you set yourself apart from them and hold back even though you'd like to connect, you instantly start building a holding back mentality in which establishing a connection and expressing your feelings becomes threatening.

*>> The people I work with were quiet but laughed and were witty. I began to hold back in the same way I did in high school, I took it upon myself to be funny but this was holding back in itself.*

Yep. The old program kicked in.

*>> I knew what I was holding back and this served to bind me together into a more compact parcel. This week I have trusted what has come up in conversations and have not tried to control every minute.*

It's great the way you handled this. You're really becoming a consummate observer.

John

23 Jul 1999

John, like always you were right about what you said in your Hawthorne essay about nothing will change unless you are around people. In work this week I have been trying out different behaviors. I know you are busy so I'll keep this brief.

All week I have been challenging my beliefs and then noticing how these change my perceptions and how emotions are strongly linked to intentions. I have been getting great success when I challenge my beliefs about myself, almost to the point where I'm immersed 100% in what I'm saying.

The best way I can describe what has been happening today is by using the breaststroke swimming movement as an analogy. When I have spoken in many situations today I have not been tight or felt tense in my stomach area. I feel what I feel about something, take a new breath and dive into a new feeling like the movement of a breaststroke swimmer. This is the result of the work I have been doing using the Hawthorn essay which to be honest is really pulling me forward. I'm going to prepare a short essay on my many observations over the last few weeks. I keep a journal every night so this will help me to compact what I'm preparing to write.

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Have a good weekend  
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Andrew,

Great stuff! What you're doing is living in the moment, which is the antidote to all the anticipating that is associated with chronic stammering. You experience something, notice what's happening, take what comes up, and let it go. An analogy would be that of floating down a river in a rowboat. If you get worried about what's around the next bend and grab onto a rock or a bush, forward progress is halted until you're willing to let go and just allow the river to take you where it's going to take you.

>> *I keep a journal every night so this will help me to compact what I'm preparing to write.*

You might want to consider publishing it some day. Your insights are excellent and highly perceptive, and you're really documenting everything in great detail and in a way that others will be able to relate to.

John

Jul 1999 15

Subject: Re: new email address

Hi John,

Have a story I would like to share with you. A man in my factory stammers, and he is very quiet. I don't know if he's quiet because of this, but I talk to him anyway. When I interact with him, it seems to me as if he would like to interact more with other people.

One day last week my hexagon was unsettled mainly due to my beliefs not being clear. I was very tired and didn't challenge the default. During dinner break I began to tell a story of what happened to an acquaintance of mine. I began to tell the story in front of a large gathering of people. The man's name is Vernon, and he came to sit by me. Usually he distances himself from everyone. Most dinner times he goes for a walk on his own. Recently, however, he has begun to sit by my group of friends.

When I began to tell the story, I gradually began to block, and it was a block that lasted quite a while. Interesting I thought, I didn't feel safe in terms of the people I was with, but I thought to hell with it and observe what happened while I was telling the story.

I was nearly there. I began to picture the story in my mind but didn't ride with the feelings it invoked while holding on to the new beliefs. I like to connect with the people I'm telling the story to and try to assess what kind of reaction I will get from them in terms of what sort of people I think they are. I regretted saying anything, not because I blocked but because I didn't consider the content and how it would relate to me as a person.

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I felt far worse about the content making me look silly (caring more about what others thought on this particular day was to do with my hexagon) rather than I did about blocking and panicking.

When I went home, I started to play back the episode and came to the conclusion that it was on the main part because of Vernon. I didn't want to let him down. I didn't want to experience the feeling of letting him down by stammering. (I thought his perception of stammering was based on my perception about my experiences of stammering.) I wanted to show him that even though he stammered he could still have fun. He could still feel part of a group. I wanted to inspire him to come out of his shell.

My hexagon that day meant that my intentions would have made it more likely for me to block. After the episode I felt slightly self-conscious that I had stammered in front of a large group of people. In the past I would have been destroyed and held back indefinitely. This time I made a conscious decision to stay in touch with these emotions, to accept and feel them. Within half an hour my equilibrium returned, and I began to challenge my default beliefs.

My perceptions, however, in the following break were very negative. Anything anyone said to me was either in relation to how I talked during the story or due to it's content. I was defensive to say the least but stayed with it. I knew it would pass. After taking the situation apart, I felt ok again and the next day was back to my bubbly self.

There are other reasons why I blocked, I don't want to work in the factory but have to raise money. I am beginning to find my niche with the group I'm with although I still do not feel 100% safe. There is a possibility, too, that I was trying to compete with Vernon in terms of me being able to speak more than him. (This may make me sound a cruel person, but it's true to say that I am very competitive and there are many things about myself which I don't like.)

I think it's fair to say that the Hawthorn essay has given me a clearer understanding.

bye

a

August 6, 1999

*[I asked Andrew if he would write an introduction for something of his that I was publishing.]*

My name is Andrew Rees, I'm from Wales in the United Kingdom. At the moment I'm studying Sociology and Psychology at the University of Swansea. I have stammered for as long as I can remember but the symptoms only became a problem when I turned sixteen. I'm now twenty-four.

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In the years before my sixteenth birthday I had the occasional block but nothing as severe and hindered that my speech became in recent years. The power of observation has given me a totally new perspective on stammering. I no longer see what I do as stammering, and this has enabled me to perceive myself and the world in a totally new and refreshing light.

(John here is the brief introduction you requested) I haven't read the article yet. I have just printed it off. I have to go to a cyber cafe these days because the University is closed! I will digest the article and give you my feedback. I have many more observations, which involve the entire hexagon but I will wait to send these as you appear very busy. I'm still very much digesting the Hawthorn essay, which again I have to say is a real revelation.)

Take care.

A

20 Aug 1999

Hi John,

This week has been a landslide in terms of events which had the potential of disrupting my new hexagon which is in the developmental stages. My work pattern changed in that I have been moved around the factory from a place where I have worked since I have been there. A caption from one of your email responses has been going around in my mind for weeks – the part when you mentioned that when one develops enough insights, one knows what to do in order to avoid causing the feelings that make us hold back.

Interesting, too, that you mentioned the two girls that I argued with, because it's precisely this that has caused some of the holding back. A new girl had to sit by me, and she was friendly with one of the two girls. The new girl was very arrogant toward me before she even knew me. I tried to get friendly with her but no matter what I did or said, she saw me through the glasses painted for her by one of the other two girls.

I overheard them laughing about the fact that I sometimes stumble on my words. After trying very hard to get friendly with her I gave up and she went to sit somewhere else, letting everyone know that she didn't like me. This all may sound trivial, after all I am a man, but this had dire consequences. I'm very sensitive and suddenly all my acquaintances were wondering why she was sitting away from me. There were very few people left in the area where I work with whom I feel comfortable connecting with. I began to hold back, I knew I would. Suddenly the factory became a different place. I felt alone. I didn't feel safe.

On the day I experienced the disruption with the girl I took a call from a friend I had talked to two days previously. Before that I hadn't talked

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to him for three years. Interestingly, the first call went very well in terms of me being me and communicating this, but on the day of the disruption I blocked with him very badly. I knew that I would block and regular as clockwork. I have and I'm learning now about what not to do which has the potential to cause me to hold back.

This week has been humbling, not in terms of blocking. I have generally been fine by trying hard to challenge my default beliefs, but in doing so I found that I was not allowing myself to experience the negative feelings that I had caused by being the way I am at the moment. I tried to cover over having to feel these feelings by trying to focus on new beliefs about myself, I have only recently found out what I have been doing, and gradually I'm getting back in touch with the flow.

I have a pretty accurate picture of the hexagon I adopted when I first started in the factory, and I have had to put up with the karma of this ever since. First impressions do last! Knowing what I do now, I would approach the situation a whole lot different.

I have a lot written down. I came to the conclusion that I have developed a default hexagon of the factory, which was born out of the hexagon I had when I began at the factory.

It's interesting to see how everything changes when the hexagon changes. I have been noticing this all week. I haven't panicked about having a lot more blocks because I have a pretty good idea why. I have just used the experience to observe more. On the bus suddenly it became of paramount importance to say thank-you to the bus driver as he dropped me off, before I wouldn't have noticed and importantly neither would he!

The prospect of developing a new hexagon I must admit is very appealing and challenging. I feel I can be anything I want to be.

An important realization I think is that fact that I have the right to adopt and develop a new default hexagon, as opposed to feeling that I'm trying to cover over my old default.

Have a good weekend. We will talk when I get my phone back on. Thank you for your offer to call.

Your essay about observing is very good. I view it differently now that what I would have last year having observed quite a bit. Everything is there. People just have to start thinking outside the box. When they do the essay on observing and the Hawthorne masterpiece will propel them forward.

bye

a

Hi Andrew,

Thanks for the long and detailed letter. Your observations continue to

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be amazingly acute. In fact, I literally don't know anyone else who is putting as much effort into investigating their stammering in such a detailed and objective way. Your comments are not just an education for you, but for me as well.

A couple of questions might make things clearer for me. What do you actually do at the plant? And how is it that people can just move their seating around the way that girl did? Hard to picture without more info.

>> The new girl was very arrogant toward me before she even knew me.

Did you continue to be overly friendly to her while she was being arrogant to you? If so, your response may not have been totally appropriate. It's one thing to be friendly, but another to pretend that someone is not sticking it to you when they are. If you were overly friendly for too long, how else might have you handled it so you left the channel of communication open without setting yourself up to be hurt?

>> Interestingly the first call went very well in terms of me being me and communicating this. But on the day of the disruption I blocked with him very badly. I knew that I would block and regular as clockwork. I have and I'm learning now about what not to do which has the potential to cause me to hold back.

Yep. You're really seeing the correlation, and as such, these experiences couldn't be more ideal for someone who wants to learn about his stammering.

>> I found that I was not allowing myself to experience the negative feelings that I had caused by being the way I am at the moment.

Yeah, it's tough for me, too. I have a lot of anger that I tend to hold in. The anger is usually a response to being hurt. So when I get into a thing with my wife, and she jumps on me for something that I don't feel is my fault, my default response is to pull away and be resentful, rather than admitting the hurt, or at least the anger...or both. When that happens, I always pay a price, because my neck and shoulders get tight, and it becomes hard to get them to relax.

>> I have a lot written down. I came to the conclusion that I have developed a default hexagon of the factory, which was born out of the hexagon I had when I began at the factory.

Entirely probable.

>> The prospect of developing a new hexagon I must admit is very appealing and challenging. I feel I can be anything I want to be.

Which is true. The only price you have to pay is that you must stay in touch with who you are and take what comes up, good or bad. When your power comes up in the form of negative energy, you have to figure out how to use that negative energy to your benefit, rather than to hold it back and contain it.

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Keep at it. You're doing great!  
John

August 23, 1999

Hi John,

I fold jumpers and T-shirts around a table with people sitting next to me. There are many tables, and she was asked to sit next to me.

My mother came down last night, and to say I returned to my default responses is an understatement. The whole evening was a total block. I have a fair idea why though. The girl in work told me how she felt about me in front of everyone. She even said she HATED me. I have a sense of humour, but I must admit I had no idea how sensitive this girl was until she blew up.

Everything changed after this. I felt foolish and belittled. I started to question whether it was all my fault and if there was something about the way I relate to people that causes them to react like these girls did last week. As usual I looked objectively and found more interesting things about myself. I have a wicked sense of humour but I'm also very sensitive and don't like it when people are witty in my direction. (I'm using these observations to work out ways in which I can cut out unnecessary bad feelings)

Everything I was trying to build over the last few months was questioned. I started to challenge the new beliefs I was developing and progress I have made. I wasn't using the negative energy, just holding it back. It's been fascinating a truly great experience being able to predict that I would hold back and stammer again after being insulated by the new hexagon I was looking to create.

I knew I was back to my default responses. I walked into a shop and bought a salad. The lady asked me whether I wanted a fork or was I going home to my HOUSE. I said that I was going home to my FLAT. When she said goodbye, I blocked and couldn't say goodbye. This was because I didn't want to experience the feeling of her thinking I corrected her by saying that I was going home to my flat rather than what she said. It's amazing!

I know I have to read now. I need to do a lot of reading. I need to build myself up like a weight lifter but in terms of developing a new hexagon.

Thanks for all your time recently John.

Bye A

26 Aug 1999

Hi John, just bought the book *Discover the Giant Within* [by Tony Robbins]. I just bought a PC, too, which is Internet ready.

I quit work yesterday. My resistance to working there was at a point

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where I was blocking just because I had to work there. The benefits of working there were completely outweighed by my resistance to doing the job. I made enough money for the summer anyway. I will return to University in two weeks.

Yesterday I blocked out everything. I had quit work and a lot of other things, which I'm aware of. One of them was a performance fear for when I talk to you on the phone! Little things, which you may think have little importance tend to be the ones you hold back.

I didn't panic. My hexagon was very disrupted, but I knew this would be the case. I knew that when I settled down and stopped running from my feelings, I'd return to some sort of equilibrium. Today this has been proved true. I really tried to use the negative feelings, and within a short while I felt closer to myself than I have for weeks. What I had been doing, I believe, is simulating feelings in accordance to the new beliefs I was trying to incorporate about myself. And in doing so was not flowing with the sine wave.

I spoke to someone from a fluency course who is aware of you and your book. I told him that I was not really looking for fluency but trying to observe what I was holding back. He told me that it had taken John Harrison years to overcome stammering. The way I see it is that life is about learning. Who I am is why I stammer. There is no conflict. At the end of the day, I'm looking to become a better person, more knowledgeable about myself and the world. At the time, the way I was perceiving made me feel that what I felt I had learned recently through the hexagon concept was nothing more than intellectualization, This did not help my beliefs. I know I'm making progress.

Observing objectively everything that I'm holding back is proving a useful aid in determining the sort of person I am and what I need to do to change. If my speech improves in the process, then fine. But right now I need to tackle who I am because there are a lot of floors in who I am. These are evident each time I speak.

bye a

Andrew,

I have a previous letter of yours, which I haven't had a chance to respond to, but I'd like to offer a few comments on your most recent post.

>> I quit work yesterday, it was getting to the point where my resistance to working there was at a point where I was blocking just because I had to work there, the benefits of working there were completely outweighed by my resistance to doing the job.

Good move. It's important to know what a situation is not serving you, and then make it okay to move on.

>> What I had been doing, I believe, is simulating feelings in accordance

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to the new beliefs I was trying to incorporate about myself. And in doing so I was not flowing with the sine wave.

Ah, very perceptive. It's easy for us to pull the wool over our own eyes. The fact that you can see the difference between real and simulated feeling is a big step.

>> I spoke to someone from a fluency course who is aware of you and your book. I told him that I was not really looking for fluency but trying to observe what I was holding back.

Out of curiosity, do you know which course the person attended?

>> He told me that it had taken John Harrison years to overcome stammering..

That makes it sound like a long time and that I was working assiduously on my speech all that time, which was not the case. I started observing myself and my speech in detail after I graduated college and got a job. But the real changes took over a three-year period in California when I was intensely involved with a particular group that was oriented towards personal growth.

Out of curiosity, do you have any opportunities to practice "acting as if?" This will be the subject of my next article. Acting as if is all about practicing the way you'd LIKE to be...to find out how it feels.

It's hard to know what you're reaching for if you don't have a sense of what it would feel like when you get there.

j.

1 Sep 1999

Hi John,

I haven't been feeling myself recently, and I couldn't put my finger on it. For weeks the equilibrium, which I have discovered through your guidance, hasn't been evident. Gone was the inner piece and clarity that I had felt through most of the summer, but I worked it out, and it was hidden.

My hexagon had totally shifted, I was looking at stammering the same way as I used to. I wasn't looking at it as the holding back of feeling. I was looking at it in the same negative sense that plagued me for years. The thing is, I didn't know my hexagon had shifted. This had altered my perceptions. I was noticing everything, every stumble on a word, every movement of my listener.

I haven't connected with anyone for a while, and it's because of this. The perceptions of the aftermath of each stammer were causing me to hold back. Therefore, I wasn't in touch with myself for large periods of time, which meant that my reactions were often unconscious and automatic.

This works in a loop. The way I was perceiving the stammer was changing

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my beliefs about myself, and the threshold of what I was willing to emotionally experience was affecting my intentions. The Hawthorn affect was getting stronger and fueling itself.

When I went back to looking at what I was doing as the holding back of feeling, everything changed. Suddenly I was like everyone else. I had patience with myself. I even found myself encouraging me, instead of beating myself up. I realized that I was holding back from certain feelings. I realized that this is a long-term problem and finding a way to dissolve it would take time.

This is an amazing transformation, and correlates with what Tony Robbins says about quick fixes. When I looked at stammering in the old negative sense, I was almost looking for a miracle spontaneous cure, a quick fix. When I changed tact I realized and was comfortable with the fact that it would take a long time.

One quick insight I feel I have found which has helped me. On the issue of feared words, I believe that feared words are more prominent when you look at stammering in the negative sense that I used to. Basically it was the inability to do what a three year old could do, speak! The perceptions born from these and similar beliefs invoked different feelings when I stammered. I believe I held back from feeling these feelings and that I don't hold back from any feeling now when I stammer because I'm perceiving what I'm doing in a totally different light. Therefore, feared words have less prominence because they are no longer loaded with stammering associated feelings.

I know you're busy. Don't worry about replying.

Bye

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Andrew,

Isn't it maddening the way the hexagon shifts? I thoroughly enjoyed your letter of 9/1. It fascinates me how, once a person is able to step back from an experience or group of experiences and gain some perspective, it is possible to see the bigger picture. This is what they talk about in chaos theory, which is a hot subject in certain circles. The theory postulates that so called random groups of events do have an organization and relationship when looked at over time and from sufficient perspective. This is why continuing to keep a broad focus is so important when you're trying to work through stammering.

>> The perceptions of the aftermath of each stammer were causing me to hold back. Therefore I wasn't in touch with myself for large periods of time, which meant that my reactions were often unconscious and automatic. This works in a loop. The way I was perceiving the stammer

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was changing my beliefs about myself, and the threshold of what I was willing to emotionally experience was affecting my intentions. The Hawthorn affect was getting stronger and fueling itself.

Yes. This is precisely what happens. An excellent characterization.

>> When I went back to looking at what I was doing as the holding back of feeling, everything changed. Suddenly I was like everyone else. I had patience with myself. I even found myself encouraging me, instead of beating myself up. I realized that I was holding back from certain feelings and realized that this is a long term problem and finding a way to dissolve it would take time.

This is absolutely true. In fact, I'll tell you a story of my own. Back in the late 60s I spent three years as a supporter of an innovative drug rehabilitation organization, a 24-hour residential facility called Synanon. The organization developed a unique group encounter format called "the Game" which allowed people to vent their feelings and which was highly effective in getting people to tell the truth about themselves. About the time I became a sponsor, they had opened up the game to nonresident sponsors like myself (they called us the "squares" for obvious reasons) who wanted the experience of self-discovery. I spent three years playing the Square Games, once and soon twice a week. This was one of the earliest personal growth programs in California and was the environment in which my stammering disappeared before it actually disappeared (if you recall, because I stopped seeing it as stammering.) When I finally moved away from the organization, I felt I had a good handle on my anger, something I had hidden all my life. Now I could express those strong feelings, and I felt very powerful, especially when I had to stand up and speak before people.

But still wanting to explore myself further, I became involved with a weekly encounter group run by a woman named Nadine. Nadine, as it turned out, was on a secret little power trip of her own. The group she ran had a hidden agenda, namely, that she had to be the only powerful person in the room. Little did I realize that week by week, little by little, I was handing my power over to her. The situation reached a breaking point after a 24-hour marathon group experience during which I wanted to be loved and held by Nadine and was rebuffed. That experience, and all the evenings leading up to it, caused my hexagon to change. I was now once again holding back my feelings, especially my anger, and that strong, resonant feeling that I'd been left with from my Synanon experience was no longer accessible to me. A new system had established itself. And it took almost a year before I began to feel like I had my power back.

The annoying thing was that all throughout my relationship with Nadine I was aware that what I was doing was bad for me. But at that time, I chose not to trust my own perceptions, partly because I was still wanting an

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authority figure in my life who had the “truth.” So I constantly ignored and discounted my own perceptions.

When you do the same thing repeatedly over a period of time, it eventually becomes a habit of thought, and ultimately, an UNCONSCIOUS habit of thought. That is, it becomes invisible, and these “invisible” feelings attitudes, beliefs, etc. eventually become self-supporting, which is why it becomes so hard to change them. This is why being a good observer is so important. Being a good observer is necessary to becoming a good detective and ultimately it can lead to uncovering the truth.

Now that you’re starting to understand what observing is about, let me up the ante a bit and ask whether you’re changing your actions in ways that put your feelings at risk. In Synanon, they used to talk about “acting as if.” They were referring to the fact that if all you did was to sit around figuring out what was going on, you were still going to remain stuck. What ultimately changes you is experience. Consequently, if a recovering drug addict said that he couldn’t work and be responsible in his dealing with people in Synanon, they’d say to him, “Act as if.” Act as if you were responsible, and your body and mind will begin to understand what that means, and it will begin to be more natural.

The 10 lessons that comprise the first part of my public speaking book are all about “acting as if” when you’re up in front of people. If you tend to stay rooted to one spot when you talk, act as if you owned the room and walk around it as if it were your own living room. Act as if you WERE comfortable. It will seem strange at first, and maybe for a good while, but if you continue to act as if, the behavior will start to become ordinary.

Similarly, if you tend to talk in a quiet voice, double your volume when you speak—even triple the volume, if you talk in a thin little voice—and discover what it feels like. I’ll guarantee you that it will feel strange and uncomfortable and ungainly at first, because you’ll be way outside your comfort zone. But you’ll be training yourself about and learning about various experiences that are unfamiliar to you. And as you continue to move more and more new experience into your comfort zone, it will start to become part of your self-image. And the two circles of your real self and your self-image will more and more begin to overlap.

*>> I believe I held back from feeling these feelings and that I don’t hold back from any feeling now when I stammer because I’m perceiving what I’m doing in a totally different light.*

This is great! Keep staying with it. You’ll have good days and bad days, but if you keep your eyes open, the pressure on you will continue to shift the hexagon, and the sine wave will continue to move on an upward slope.

When does school start, or has it? Hope things are going well.

John

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September 7, 1999

Hi John,

Thank you for your detailed mail. It was a very interesting read.

My parents came down tonight. I felt like I was holding back, and was, but then I asked myself if I had anything to say. I hadn't. My life isn't full enough. I know this, and I am going to try to fill it up more.

What's been bothering me lately is the comparison between the McGuire course and the route I'm following now. I know I did my best on the McGuire course. No one worked as hard as me I'm told, but I just kept relapsing. What's bothering me now is that it's difficult to not feel like I need to perform. I was told by some people on the McGuire course that many just focus on the hexagon because they are lazy. I know as far as observing is concerned that I'm not lazy.

I have got it. It's just come to me. On the McGuire course you get immediate results because of the Hawthorn affect. Maybe I'm just being impatient, but this has been making me feel unhappy. What I need to know is that I'm on the right lines. What I have written here is more personal than my usual mails. I hope you don't mind.

My phone is now connected by the way. I guess that the route I'm taking is sometimes lonely. I would be nice to have others around. Are there NSP groups in the UK?

Thanks for you time John.

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Thu, 9 Sep 1999

Hi John, another mail, I know, and I apologize. I know you're busy, but something happened today which I thought was important to document.

Today I have been dreading a telephone call all day, and the dread was there because I was holding back. For most of the day I had a sinking feeling about the call, and the more I tried to get rid of it or distract myself from it the stronger it got. What I did was to think it through and ask myself how I felt about it.

I felt undecided, and this was causing tension and anxiety. So I remembered what you told me ages ago – to make it Ok to feel tense and anxious (make it OK to feel how you feel), and I felt it and felt it. When the phone rang I embraced the feeling and picked up the phone. By embracing it I used the feeling to fuel what I said. I didn't think of any particular words, and I acted "as if." I know someone who I believe to be a very eloquent speaker. I paused. I thought. I laughed. Everything clicked under these

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tremendous negative feelings. I reminded myself to stay open yesterday and use the feelings to guide the words.

Thanks John.

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Andrew,

Just happened to read over one of your last emails and noticed something I wanted to respond to.

>> *It's just come to me, on the McGuire course – you get immediate results because of the Hawthorn affect,*

Quite right. You get immediate results because you're addressing many points on the Hexagon simultaneously, which is what initiates the Hawthorne Effect. The constant concern, caring, and support from the coaches and other course members creates a strong sense of community. This cannot help but have a profound effect on each course member, just like putting those ladies at the Hawthorne plant into their own group gave each of them a powerful sense of community and helped them to raise their self-esteem.

BTW, if you haven't already, you should check into the Stuttering Home Page and read the papers posted on the International Stuttering Awareness Day (ISAD) 99 Conference. The one by Woody Starkweather is particularly good.

j.

27 Sep 1999

Hi John,

Began University again and have been allowed to pursue a degree which I wanted to in year one, that being a degree in psychology. I'm pleased about that.

I do agree that the McGuire course is beneficial to letting go. Last year I gave it 110% and vowed to learn from the experience of relapse. I had made a commitment to do the best I could, but even when I was relatively free to speak, the words I used were not mine, I was speaking, not to represent who I am, but not to relapse and avoid. This caused all sorts of problems because I wasn't using the method to create a new hexagon, I was just using it to keep up a performance.

I discussed this and other matters with a very successful McGuire graduate and my experience of recovery was not like his at all, I told him I had very little idea of how I felt about anything last year when I was on the course and the words I spoke were meaningless. I was not at equilibrium with myself. He advised me not to come back onto the course for a while until I have a better concept of who I am. This is what I have been doing with your help. I have been exploring myself. The realization that this problem

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is not one of speech but of holding back of feeling has been a revelation for me, totally changing my old hexagon.

I am at a very exciting stage I feel. Through the above revelation I was able to free myself of the struggle to try and speak by not stammering and discover the person underneath the anxiety. The person masked by the anxiety is the total opposite to the one who saw stammering as a speech problem, I'm very relaxed and easy going ironically – the trait I always admired in other people. I can usually find the answers to things inside myself. I truly ask myself how I feel about things. And to be honest, I'm relatively calm about everything. When I follow this guidance. I don't block, and I'm rarely anxious.

What's important, I feel, is that this inner strength has been freed up with the hexagon concept. Speech is not important compared with the piece of mind I get when I follow my gut instincts, something which I'm learning to do.

I hear you're doing a course in November in Britain? Hope so.

Take care. Andrew

Andrew,

Delighted to hear that (1) you're pursuing a line of studies that interests you, and (2) that you're hooking up with the McGuire people again. I do think, as you do, that timing is important. Taking out time for reflection and self-discovery will create a different experience of the McGuire course. You will be looking at it through a different window.

I also have had the experience of doing a personal growth training in 1977 and then doing it all again in 1988, and the second time, I entered at a much higher level and got more out of it. Well, I say more, but that's not quite right. You always get what is appropriate for who you are AT THAT TIME. But the second time, I did push myself further because I'd had 11 years to work through my first round of insights and experiences.

I also saw this principle at work in the business world. There are some people who go from home to college to the big corporation, and they are always in a paternal environment where Big Brother is looking out for them. And they have a very fixed view of authority. Then there are those who go out in the world and have broader and varied experiences. Perhaps they try to do something independently. If these people then decide to work for a big corporation, they view the corporate authority figures differently, because they've had the experience of being their own authority for a while.

>> *What's important, I feel, is that this inner strength has been freed up with the hexagon concept. Speech is not important compared with the piece of mind I get when I follow my gut instincts – something which I'm learning to do.*

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Right on, bro. Learning to trust yourself is where it's at.  
John

October 5, 1999

Re: Another article

Read your latest article. Very interesting. I'll need to let it float around in my mind for a couple of days for it to have any effect. I did identify with it over the last few days. Well tonight, actually, I asked similar questions about what I was REALLY afraid of. A lot of my own answers pointed to rejection.

Recently, I have been looking at the flight or fight responses triggered by stammering thoughts. My mother is an occupational therapist, and I told her I was interested in exploring the feelings when I block. I haven't been feeling too good recently, and we had a chat. At the point of speech I have been locking up – just panic.

I have been trying to follow my gut feelings about things. It's almost like I'm following my inner self. Inside I always seem to know what's best for me. When I follow this guidance, I'm always in the present rather than anticipating the future or dwelling on the past. I feel calm and full of life. Thoughts float around my mind naturally, but when a thought triggers an anxiety response I usually don't like the physical reactions of anxiety. And noticing my physical reactions, I start to get more and more anxious which stimulates more thoughts, and it gets into a cycle.

It struck me that these physical reactions can be caused by over-breathing, and at the height of this physical reaction, I react like a rabbit in the headlights. I freeze. My reaction to this physical feeling of anxiety and what thoughts trigger it depends entirely on my mindset.

When I follow my inner self (let's call it that), I don't react to anxious thoughts, and therefore the physical feelings, in the same degree as if I had no reference point on the world. [My stammering is] just a never-ending reaction and holding back of thoughts and feelings.

Hope this makes sense.

All the best,

Andrew

29 Oct 1999

Hi John. How are things? Just keeping in touch. It's fair to say that over the last few weeks I have had a really tough time. My anxiety levels have shot through the roof.

It seems to me the nature of this thing is that you think you've got it licked while it's been reinforcing itself. Phew! Where do I start? Basically I have just been avalanched, completely smothered! I learnt a lot over the

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summer about the acceptability of feelings etc. Now that just seems like a memory.

The harder I try to just let myself feel, the worse it gets. The thing is, I find myself reacting to every thought I'm having, and the reaction is one of fear. The reaction is one of fear because of my hexagon, which at the moment is pretty negative. It would be easy to sit back and continually kick myself, but tonight I have adopted a different approach.

All my family suffer with anxiety. My mother suffers acutely. There must be some element to my physiology, which is organically anxiety prone. I just accepted it tonight. I accepted how vulnerable I felt. I accepted the fearful person I have become again and put it down to an organic reaction.

I keep reminding myself that things will be fine once I go back on the McGuire course, but the reality is that I get more anxious about relapsing than I do about the reality of stammering, I have got to find a mentality where recovery is fun and where I don't put pressure on myself to PERFORM! I was thinking about reading some sports psychology manuals to find out how good sportsmen maintain their sporting careers by lessening the fear of failure.

On the positive side, University is going well. I finally in my life feel as if I have direction. I'm really into physiological psychology, and I'm learning a lot about neurons and the central nervous system etc.

Take care,  
Andrew

Andrew,

Sorry for the delay in getting back to you. Been busy.

*>> It's fair to say that over the last few weeks I have had a really tough time. My anxiety levels have shot through the roof, it seems to me the nature of this thing is that you think you've got it licked while it's been reinforcing itself.*

Okay, try this one. If you were going to explain your mind and emotional set over the last few weeks WITHOUT talking about stammering — that is, explain it solely by non-speech related factors — what kinds of things come to mind?

*>> I learnt a lot over the summer about the acceptability of feelings etc. Now that just seems like a memory. The harder I try to just let myself feel, the worse it gets.*

Feeling the feelings is part of it, but not all of it. Do you have anyone with whom you can SHARE the feelings? What opportunities do you have to express what you feel? Are you trying to go it alone?

*>> I keep reminding myself that things will be fine once I go back on the*

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*McGuire course but the reality is that I get more anxious about relapsing than I do about the reality of stammering,*

How come you're so caught up in performance fears right now? What is triggering this?

Are you in touch with having fun in your life? Are you doing anything that's fun?

*>> The thing is, I find myself reacting to every thought I'm having, and the reaction is one of fear.*

Of...? (List at least five things that bring up fear.)

*>> The reaction is one of fear because of my hexagon which at the moment is pretty negative.*

How did it get so negative? What events led up to that?

*>> I have got to find a mentality where recovery is fun and where I don't put pressure on myself to PERFORM!*

Have you done any stammering on purpose? This might be a good time to do more of this.

I tend to get perfectionistic when my personal relationships aren't going well, when I'm not in touch with the real me, and when I'm not doing things that I really care about. Going to a Speaking Circle, for example, helps to get me out of this because I have an opportunity to "give" to an audience when I speak, and to "give" to individuals when I provide feedback. This act of giving...of being in service to others...helps me big time to stop obsessing on myself and what I'm feeling.

*>> I was thinking about reading some sports psychology manuals to find out how good sportsmen maintain their sporting careers by lessening the fear of failure.*

Focusing on reducing the fear of failure is like focusing on being fluent. The more you think about the problem, the more it runs you. To reduce the fear of failure, you have to remove yourself from the Win-Lose game and start playing a different game altogether.

This making any sense?

*>> On the positive side, University is going well, I finally in my life feel as if I have direction. I'm really into physiological psychology, and I'm learning a lot about neurons and the central nervous system etc.*

Hey, great! Sounds fantastic.

Hang in there.

John

Hi J,

*>> If you were going to explain your mind and emotional set over the last few weeks WITHOUT talking about stammering — that is, explain it solely by non-speech related factors — what kinds of things come to*

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*mind?*

Neutral, running from my feelings. What I have found recently is I'm beginning to see what was going on again. It's amazing how I hid the fact that I didn't want to feel anything again. I felt numb.

*>> Do you have anyone with whom you can SHARE the feelings? What opportunities do you have to express what you feel? Are you trying to go it alone?*

I do have someone special who has had a rough time herself. I feel I can tell her anything. Sunday she called. I sounded awful (not speech) because I felt awful. I felt down, so accepted this and my words reflected how I felt.

Again, doing this gave me a new freedom to talk. I was able to just let my feelings dictate what I said. By concentrating on how I felt rather than how I would say words, I found myself quite easily being able to maintain a conversation and stay conscious when the fear hit.

*>> How come you're so caught up in performance fears right now? What is triggering this?*

University. Not feeling I am enough. Over the summer I was gradually breaking through the layers to the real me, and when it came to it, a girl said something to me that sent me spiraling. She said, "you make me laugh as a person". This girl I had dealings with before. I know how it was intended (what she said). I guess this began to get things going again.

What's happening is that I don't feel I am enough, I'm not prepared to be me and relax. I feel I have to be something more than I am. With University came new responsibilities – talking in seminar groups, fear of not making friends, etc. I also do a job in the evenings. I don't like the job, but do it for the extra income. A guy in work makes me feel vulnerable. He's the type to jump on any weakness and use it to his advantage. Naturally my speech with him is very disrupted at times.

*>> Are you in touch with having fun in your life? Are you doing anything that's fun?*

No.

*>> To reduce the fear of failure, you have to remove yourself from the Win-Lose game and start playing a different game altogether*

I am going to go back onto the McGuire course because it offers me the best hope of overcoming stammering. It also uses a lot of your concepts, which I have been trying to follow without the breathing. The thing is, it's difficult to remove yourself from the win-lose game when you're on the McGuire course. Overcoming stammering is seen as a sport. Basically, you cannot stammer. I accept this but need to turn my mentality around to see this process as fun.

Thanks John.

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Andrew,

Yep, it's pretty clear why your speech has been going down the tubes. Your whole system has not been supportive of your need to be self-assertive and open to what you feel.

I suspect that the self-assertion thing is especially critical. What did you do when the girl said, "You make me laugh as a person." What do you think she meant by it? How did you respond?

>> *What's happening is that I don't feel I am enough, I'm not prepared to be me and relax.*

You are smart, sensitive, unusually perceptive, and capable of being self-assertive if you choose to be so. But it sounds like you're backing away in all these situations. And each time you do so, it's just that much more that you're holding onto.

Eventually, you end up with this big gunnysack of feelings that you're carrying around with you, and that threaten to rush out any time you're in direct contact and communication with someone. How can you handle these situations so that you don't always walk away feeling like you've lost something from the interchange? Take the situation with the girl. What other options did you have that would have allowed you to preserve your self-respect and self-esteem?

These are the kinds of questions you need to address. And I know you can if you put your mind to it.

Remember, what doesn't kill you will make you stronger. :-)

John

November 9, 1999

>> *Eventually, you end up with this big gunnysack of feelings that you're carrying around with you, and that threaten to rush out any time you're in direct contact and communication with someone.*

That statement is the most profound I have ever heard with regards to stammering, wow!! That really puts what's been happening into perspective. I had to reply just to comment on that statement.

As far as the incident with the girl goes, I was jealous of her. She could deal with people better than I perceived I could. I admired her because of the effortless way she talked. All this in my mind made her better than me. I had my reasons for not liking her, but everyone else seemed to respect the way she gossiped. It was this that started this whole thing off again.

I'm not angry. It's a good learning curve. My problem, as you so rightly put it, is my lack of self-assertion. I know you have come through this process. I have to say you're always spot on, and I'm eternally grateful. I gather you're in Britain at the end of November?

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December 12, 1999

Hi John,

Just writing to say thank you for your effort this year with regards to replying to my emails, it has meant a lot to me and has changed me as a person for the better.

I have been seeing a counselor recently, someone who I can tell anything to and who seems to understand my problem better than me! She has made more sense of the problem than I have managed in ten years! It really feels good to know that she's there and that the boundaries of what I can tell her are infinite. A lot of my problem is mistrust of others. There is more, but I have been emotionally dysfunctional for a long, long time.

I have been making a conscious effort to change the way I react to speaking, I figured that fear is only one of a number of options I can choose to take. The way I react to my thoughts internally dictates the way I react when I embark on expressing my feelings. I HAVE ADOPTED a more assertive role, which I'm trying to consciously develop. Like putting on a new suit, [I've been] acting "as if", [and] the results have been remarkable in terms of being able to talk.

The beauty of it is the longer you act as if, the more your subconscious catches up and becomes what you're acting. It's amazing the way you filter your thoughts differently when you act as if.

Merry Christmas to you and your wife, and a happy millennium.

Andrew

>> I gather you're in Britain at the end of November?

Ixnay. They only were able to get 18 people signed up. I was in competition with Heide's social weekend in London in November, plus I need some new material if I want to bring in McGuire people who went through the course in Ramsbottom.

So it'll be sometime next year instead.

j.

December 24, 1999

Re: Merry CHRISTMAS

John,

Sending me the revised edition of your book was a lovely gesture and has really made me happy.

The book is packed with EVERYTHING a person needs to uncover their stammering. I feel honoured to have a copy, I'm also very pleased to see that it is available to people who speak French. The cover is a warm colour,



which also appealed to me.

Being part of the book, as I am, is very special to me. More importantly, I know people will perhaps think differently about their stammering because of the added chapter. (I don't like to use the word stammering but for convenience I will here.)

The message that you wrote on the front is also a lovely gesture from a man who has brought positive energy to those who have struggled in their own mire.

Apologies for not sending you a card, although you know how I feel about the help you have given me this year.

ALL THE BEST FOR THE NEW YEAR.

Andrew

18 Jan 2000

Hi John,

My counselor is really great, and I trust her 100%. Today we discussed psychodrama and mind mapping. Everything she tells me mirrors what you have told me. This is very reassuring. I have had lengthy discussions with my parents about the past and we have resolved a lot of the baggage I had. I feel like a "jack in the box", ready for the world.

Hope you had a good Christmas and are having a refreshing new year.

Andrew

16 Feb 2000

John,

How you keeping?

I'm continuing with the counseling and stumbled across some more interesting occurrences. When I take a particular sleeping pill, which has a sedative affect, I don't stammer. The problem ceases to become a word-by-word trial. I'm fully immersed in the moment, and I'm not aware that I'm talking. It's amazing.

I now I need to expand my comfort zone. My counselor knows about the prescribed drug and has issued me a sedative along with her general counseling to help get me integrated into everyday life once again.

Anyway all for now.

Andrew

17 Mar 2000

John,

It's been a while since I last sent you an email. Hope you're keeping well.

I'm in the middle of revising for my second year exams! I now understand fully about what you said about only remaining open when you are connecting with people. It took me a while to fully appreciate that.

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I told you that I have found some relief from a sedative drug. My experiences with it were valuable in the sense that it restored spontaneity to my speech that I hadn't experienced for years. It struck me that even when I was on the McGuire course I was never really truly spontaneous, even though I thought I was because I could say words. The undercurrent of anxiety never left which caused me to hold back, I never allowed myself to fully engage with the person I was talking to.

Now I see that you need to develop a mental representation of the nature of people and speak to them through this impression, but crucially ALLOW this to engage you and let the river lead you to wherever it will. This might sound naive, but speaking is like life, and mirrors it. You can have plans for the future and follow them, but don't try and control every single moment. Just BE. I'm now not taking the drug to speak, but from it I gained a lot of interesting insights. I experienced what you said to Jack Menear about talking and not even knowing you're talking. You just get an idea of what you want to say and override the forward-looking radar, which evidently scans each word for possible dangers. Anyway, all for now.

All the best,  
Andrew

Well, look who's here. How are you, Andrew? I was just thinking about you and wondering how you were doing.

*>> This might sound naive, but speaking is like life, and mirrors it. You can have plans for the future and follow them, but don't try and control every single moment. Just BE.*

As usual, your observations are right on the money. And your comments are not at all naive; in fact, most people don't ever understand what you've just articulated.

*>> I never allowed myself to fully engage with the person I was talking to.*

THAT, my friend, is one of the most enduring truths about people who stutter. We attempt to get the words out without putting ourselves at risk (or what we think of as at risk!) by establishing an emotional connection with those we're speaking to.

*>> You just get an idea of what you want to say and override the forward moving radar, which evidently scans each word for possible dangers.*

You betcha. That's the way the typical speaker operates who has not learned he has to protect himself from speech-related dangers. It is, in effect, the Zen of speaking.

It was good to hear from you and to learn that things appear to be going well.

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Regards,  
John

P.S. There's a chance that I may get to London the end of November to do a programme. If it looks like it might take place, I'll let you know.

4/3/2000

John,

I have an analogy which I thought was interesting. Its underlying theme centers on your notion of the forward moving radar.

I have a CD player in my car. It's great, brilliant stereo sound. One problem I have encountered with this unit is that it distorts the music it's playing when I run over a bump in the road. Sometimes the music goes off temporarily. Some nights when I drive home from University I like to take the long route home to unwind. I take a particular route, which means driving on a road with many ditches. One ditch is very deep. The road like many others around my area has been neglected.

Driving over this particular ditch caused an interruption to the music I was playing. In fact, on the first few occasions the sound went off completely. This interruption brought the event to my conscious awareness. Momentarily I wondered what damage the bump might have caused to my CD or the unit. This happened three or four times, each time I briefly wondered what the potential damage might be and why I pay road tax!

One night I was driving along this stretch of road and reached a roundabout about 100 metres away from the ditch. Suddenly I remembered about the potential dangers of the bump, having not consciously thought about it for three or four days. This served to remind me to slow down to avoid a possible disturbance in the music and damage to the unit. This amazed me. I quickly linked it to words I sometimes get blocked on. I could elaborate on this but I really need to get back into the books, I know you understand the analogy.

Also, "acting as if" when connecting with another person has a definite potential to alter your self-concept in a way, which can totally change your world. I think to really get a handle on stammering, you need a broad understanding of the world. Having a knowledge of the many imperfections of humans, it's not something I can put into words right now. It's basically knowing that not one person is perfect, that many people suffer with anxiety, and that there is no right or wrong.

I haven't got time to really go into this. What I have said are mere generalizations which in the way it's been briefly presented may have no relevance to anyone else, only me.

Anyway, all for now. Take care.  
Andrew

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17 Mar 2000

Andrew,

>> *Suddenly I remembered about the potential dangers of the bump, having not consciously thought about it for three or four days. This served to remind me to slow down to avoid a possible disturbance in the music and damage to the unit. This amazed me. I quickly linked it to words I sometimes get blocked on.*

You're right in that it's the same forward-looking process in which you initiate a strategy to avoid a potential danger. Sailing smoothly around the ditch would be an effective strategy. On the other hand, jamming your foot on the brake and abruptly stopping the car until you feel ready to move on would not be a particularly effective strategy (and could even get you rear ended).

>> *Also, acting as if when connecting with another person has a definite potential to alter your self concept in a way which can totally change your world.*

Right. Acting "as if" replaces behavior which plays to your weaknesses and fears. That is, it reinforces more confidence-building behavior.

>> *I think to really get a handle stammering you need a broad understanding of the world and having a knowledge of the many imperfections of humans.*

Perhaps that's a bit of an overstatement. A broad understanding of the world is certainly good to have. But having a broad understanding and acceptance of YOURSELF is what seems to be key.

Thanks for the analogy. Enjoyed reading it.

j.

May 10, 2000

Hi John,

Have you read much research on the genetics of stammering? It amazed me the other day. I was only thinking to myself, I have this potentially distressing problem. Yet I have never really sought any in-depth answers, apart from what had been put in front of me! I came into contact with your material through the McGuire program. On an individual level, however, I have never sought out information. I thought perhaps that indirectly I didn't want to overcome the problem. Otherwise I would be travelling to the conscious boundaries of what is known!

Next year I plan to do a dissertation on stammering for my final year. Without wishing to sound arrogant, perhaps naively I believe that stammering can be contributed to by both heredity and environmental reasons using the distinction between primary and secondary stammer-

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ing. One day I want to be in a position where I can contribute to the knowledge of stammering. You know, the more I know, the less I know!

As for myself, well, bit by bit perhaps things are getting clearer although it's still like a never ending nightmare, it strikes me that the only drugs known to help prevent the symptoms of the mentality are antipsychotic drugs! Perhaps there is a correlation there somewhere between stammering and mental illness! Do you remember a few months ago I told you about a drug I was taking and it was preventing me from stammering? This drug is an hypnotic sleeping pill. When I take it, it more or less curtails a greater proportion of my conscious thought. I have contacted the drug company in the hope that maybe in the future perhaps some research may come from this, and in doing so the anxiety prior to speaking is dramatically reduced, as too is the holding back. This perhaps indicates that much of the stammering is programmed and therefore can be changed.

I plan to go back onto the McGuire course at some stage, I haven't been on a course for two years, reason being that I just relapsed and continued to do so. Until I get some realization as to why I keep relapsing I figured that no amount of added effort would help, hence, I haven't returned in a long while. One reason why I think I relapsed is because I had no long-term aim other than defeat stammering! The question here I ask myself is "when you have defeated it, then what"? My reply – 'I don't know'! Maybe this is why I kept relapsing,. Ever heard the term "we are what we eat"? It can also apply to what we think! Anyway, got to get back to the books. The course is really gripping me, but it has highlighted how naive all of us are about this magical mystery tour.

Hope you are ok,

A

Hi,

*>> For me, recovery from stuttering began when I was willing to own up to what I thought and felt and be fully up front about it. I had to assert myself in risky situations, have my discomfort level zoom off the scale, and still reveal who I was and what I was feeling. I had to start making it okay for me to be me.*

Very interesting article. I have read it before but it seems to be more salient now that I have matured slightly.

*>> Owning up to what I thought and felt.*

To do this, did you make the conscious decision to focus your mind on other things in life? With regards to myself, in the past certainly, I have not known what I thought or felt, so I was, and still to a certain extent am, vulnerable to lock up.

Recently I have found a great deal of fluency while I have been doing my

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examinations. An extra dimension to this is that I study psychology, which provokes thought about many areas of life, from the individual to the environment. It has amazed me that at the level I am learning, elements of psychology are based on theoretical assumptions, not substantial proof.

Through the endless journals I have read, it appears that we have much to learn. This has improved the way I think about myself. (My description here is very basic to make it brief.) My world is not so egocentric (me against the world, or as you said, having to get someone off the mountain, rather than allowing everyone to stand on top of their individual mountains.) I realize that this is my world as much as it is anyone else's, and a contribution from myself would be valuable. I use the word valuable to refrain from the words 'right' or 'wrong'.

I have been doing many hours of reading and learning over the past two months, which has interrupted my usual flow of thought. It strikes me that reading could be a key element in my recent fluent episode. I find reading totally engaging. In my current opinion the stammering mentality masks the person from experiencing who they are.

The point I'm making is that my current university work has disrupted my usual mentality and has allowed me to consider how other people perceive the world. This has enabled me to, in some situations, prevent locking up which in my experience follows the tension that is always evident when under the stammering mentality cloud.

When my conscious thought is free from the mentality, I'm usually relaxed, not preparing myself for either fight or flight, and this dramatically reduces the initial propensity to lock up. When I do lock up, usually when I'm caught up in the mentality mid-conversation, I remind myself that I am equal to everyone else, and it really doesn't matter if I stammer. Life is too important. This appears to lessen the importance of getting every word 'right', and it appears that I lift out of the mentality like rising above an overcast sky and realizing that the sun always shines even though the sky is grey.

All for now. Keep well, keep learning. Andrew

Andrew,

Okay, got a few minutes.

>> *Have you read much research on the genetics of stammering?*

I've read a little in the media, but I really can't get too interested in it because people are not clear about what they mean by stammering. Therefore, the discussions seem like a lot of vague nonsense to me.

I have, however, read books that RELATE to stammering, such as "The Highly Sensitive Person" and "Emotional Intelligence." And they fascinate

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me.

*>> without wishing to sound arrogant, perhaps naively, I believe that stammering can be contributed to by both heredity and environmental reasons using the distinction between primary and secondary stammering.*

Of course they are contributing factors, but what PART of the stuttering system does heredity impact? Think about it.

*>> perhaps there is a correlation there somewhere between stammering and mental illness!*

There is a correlation between stammering and emotions...and mental illness and emotions. But I'm not sure that it makes any kind of point.

*>> Do you remember a few months ago I told you about a drug I was taking and it was preventing me from stammering?*

Was it preventing you from stammering, or was it diminishing the unwanted and uncomfortable feelings that contribute to the speech block?

*>> Until I get some realization as to why I keep relapsing*

You're not the only McGuire graduate to be dealing with relapse. Keep in mind that if you don't address all of the hexagon, those parts that contribute to the blocking behavior will still want to push to the surface. It's like trying to keep a beach ball underwater. It takes a lot of effort, and once you stop pushing down, the ball pops to the surface again.

So then how do you keep the beach ball from popping to the surface without having to effort so hard? Think about it. What ELSE has to change?

*>> One reason why I think I relapsed is because I had no long term aim other than defeat stammering!*

RIGHT ON!!! Your goals were much too limited. Keep in mind that the blocks underlying stammering are concerned with much more than just speech. But then, you already know this....

*>> The question here I ask myself is 'when you have defeated it, then what'?*

I never did defeat stammering. I simply disassembled it, changed myself and how I thought and felt, developed awareness of what I was doing when I blocked, started showing people who I was, and the problem disappeared. There's a BIG difference between the two approaches.

*>> ever heard the term 'we are what we eat' it can also apply to what we think!*

Of course! Here's another corollary — "You are what you practice each day." And I'm not just talking about speech." Some aspect about YOU has to change that relates to how you think, feel, and perceive. When those changes take place, you will look at yourself differently.

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*>> When I do lock up, usually when I'm caught up in the mentality mid-conversation, I remind myself that I am equal to everyone else, and it really doesn't matter if I stammer. Life is too important. This appears to lessen the importance of getting every word 'right'*

The key to what has to change lies in these words.

Keep probing. Everything you're doing is having an effect under the surface.

John

John,

How's things. If you have a minute, I would like to share with you my recent observations. Recently I have been really letting go and have tried to put stammering to one side. I have been able to speak with relative ease. When the fear comes up, I let it be there and allow the moment to guide what I say. I allow the connection with the other person to guide what I'm saying.

Phew! Now the adventure of life is starting! To think I thought beating stammering was the real battle! As you said, you don't beat it, you dissolve it.

Having the freedom to speak has highlighted many characteristics about my personality, which I don't like. I initially I felt at one with everyone else. Then I began to react to everything as a child would – tantrums, aggression. It got to the stage where I couldn't bear to hear me!

Peace of mind doesn't coincide with not stammering as I thought it would. Morality is a key issue, and this stems from the hexagon. I became totally self-centered, as if no one else in the world existed except me. And this increased the likelihood of holding back. I didn't have anything to share verbally with anyone because they were in my world! Certainly this is my experience, which I'm aware of and addressing.

a

Andrew,

*>> Initially I felt at one with the everyone else. Then I began to react to everything as a child would – tantrums, aggression. It got to the stage where I couldn't bear to hear me! Peace of mind doesn't coincide with not stammering as I thought it would,*

Yeah, ain't it a bitch. We grow up thinking that our problems all stem from our stammering, and what a shock it is to find out that they stem from who we ARE.

Well, you're making great strides. To come upon all this stuff and to have the character and fortitude to keep plowing ahead puts you way out in front of the pack. You're doing the toughest thing of all, which is to

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stand back and look at what's going on without flinching.

I went through a lot of crap myself, and (I tell myself) I'm a better person for it. Remember, what doesn't kill you will make you stronger.

Enuff platitudes for one night. I'm off to bed. Nice hearing from you as always.

j.

June 19, 2000

Re: Keeping in touch

John,

I'm planning to do research on stammering for my third year project. I couldn't think of anyone else in the world better to discuss it with. I will be using a questionnaire and plan to use about 150 people.

I'm particularly interested in your concepts about the hexagon. I want to use a theory of the development of the self to ask the question of whether initial articulatory stammering leads to secondary stammering or if secondary stammering is caused through environmental social factors. The theory of the development of the self I plan to use is a theory by Cooley (1957). He suggests that the self-concept is developed through the reflections of others regarding our own behavior. Our behaviour, then, is reflected by others, and this is how the self develops.

It's important to indicate that this research will be basic and will appear so to someone with immense experience and knowledge like yourself. However, it is an original idea and no one in the history of my department has ever investigated stammering.

To someone like yourself, secondary stammering does not resemble articulatory bobulation. As you said, the majority of so called experts often confuse what stammering is. I want to investigate whether people's reactions to bobulation and the social consequences lead to secondary characteristics of blocking by creating a system (self) that creates stammering. As I said I need to devise a questionnaire, I plan to use stammering individuals and non-stammering individuals. I would appreciate any feedback.

Thanks.

a

Andrew,

Sorry to take so long to get back to you, but things have been busy. What I was doing in Chicago was attending the annual convention of the National Stuttering Association. I gave a couple of workshops and was part of a panel. It was the biggest and best convention we've had — almost 600 people showed up!

>> *I want to use a theory of the development of the self to ask the*

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question of                      whether initial articulatory stammering leads to secondary stammering or if                      secondary stammering is caused through environmental social factors.

This is a good question to ask, but my suggestion is that you take it further than researchers and academics traditionally do. Almost anyone who researches this issue looks at it ONLY from the point of view that primary stammering, as they call it, is the major or only causal factor that leads to secondary or chronic stammering. AND THEY NEVER SEEM TO LOOK FURTHER THAN THAT! Now, there's no question that primary stammering CAN be a trigger, but I keep pushing for people to see that it is seldom the only causal factor, and often, there are other causes that are more responsible for the problem.

Let me give you an example. If a young child has issues around sex, aggression, self-assertion, or creativity, these issues may lead to what you called articulatory stammering.

Thus, when the child does manifest that kind of stammering, if others react to it, then he may begin to adopt the coping strategies that over time can lead to secondary stammering (blocking). BUT — and it's a big BUT — the secondary stammering can be triggered, not just by the primary stammering but by the FEELINGS associated with the primary stammering. In fact, the feelings BY THEMSELVES can be the main causal factor. You don't even need the primary stammering if the feelings are threatening enough.

Another point — when you say, “ask the question of whether initial articulatory stammering leads to secondary stammering or if secondary stammering is caused through environmental social factors,” you are falling into the common trap of either-or thinking. Why does it have to be an either-or statement? Why can't it be an “and/and” statement? That is, why can't both primary stammering AND environmental social factors be contributing factors. In fact, I propose that they are. Further, I've been asserting, as you know, that this is a SYSTEM problem, which has many contributing causal agents, ALL of which influence one another.

So I'd be careful of not allowing the professionals to program you into either-or thinking.

>> *The theory of the development of the self I plan to use is a theory by Cooley (1957), he suggests that the self-concept is developed through the reflections of others regarding our own behavior. Our behaviour then is reflected by others, and this is how the self develops. Can't argue with Cooley's proposition. It makes complete sense.*

>> *I want to investigate whether people's reactions to bobulation and the social consequences lead to secondary characteristics of blocking by creating a system (self) that creates stammering.*

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Again, it's tough, but you need to be aware of when you're falling into the familiar problem description of simple cause and effect. This is definitely not the kind of problem that lends itself to such a simple paradigm.

Anyway, there's my off-the-top two cents worth.

Looks like my workshop the first weekend in Sydney will be well attended. Doris and I are really looking forward to the trip. And the Ireland workshop in mid-October seems to be gathering momentum as well.

It's late and time to hit the snoozer. Nice to hear about what you're doing. Sounds like a great third year project.

All the best,

John

John,

How's things? Well I hope.

Decided to do a dissertation about stammering, I had initially wanted to do a research project but was unable to due to a lack of available supervisors. The dissertation will be about Zen and the art of speaking. One section will be about stammering (an overview). Another section will be about Zen principles. I will then tie both together in an attempt to explore Zen and the art of speaking.

I'm back on the observation trail with regards to speech, I feel a lot more confident going into speaking situations, I try not to follow the fear when it hits, and it hits when I want to hold back. At this stage I'm prone to hold back from many things. The trick, I find, is to catch it before you get caught up.

Last night for instance I went to my grandmother's home where my parents were doing a little DIY for her. I was fine for the first hour. No fear, being spontaneous, calm. After a while I ran out of things to say and stopped following the moment, and I began to hold back. This progressed. I got it back for while, then it slipped again until I was caught in the world of holding back. Trying to say anything was difficult. I found myself going automatically with the fear.

I'm not down beat about what happened. I understand better the role holding back plays in stammering. Perhaps stammering is just a technique used to hide from yourself the fact that you have a tendency to hold back.

I'm getting better at picking up the holding back before it sets in. When I'm not holding back, I'm getting a clearer image of the kind of person I am. And this is helping to pull me out of how I feel when I hold back. At the moment I'm more than prepared to risk myself in situations – in any situation – to the extent that next week I'm going on a blind date. I'm reassuring myself that I'm going into the situation armed with my natural self.

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What was interesting about last night's episode was that gradually over a period of time, through following the moment, I lost touch with all I have learned about observing and how to combat the holding back, to the extent that the negative process jumped in through the back door. Experience I'm sure is necessary.

Hope you're having a relaxing summer and enjoying life.

Andrew

Andrew,

>> *After a while I ran out of things to say and stopped following the moment and I began to hold back.*

What were you trying NOT to notice (i.e.,: , experience?)

How did you FEEL when you ran out of things to say? What thoughts came to mind? What beliefs took over?

How do you feel about your grandmother? How do you perceive her? Does she have any power over you? If so, what is that power? Do you NEED something from her? If so, what?

If you DIDN'T hold back, what might have happened? (Let your imagination roam free on this one.)

>> *stammering is just a technique used to hide from yourself the fact that you have a tendency to hold back.*

Yup! The struggle to speak while at the same time secretly desiring to hold back is what creates the visible behaviors we know as stammering. You were being pulled in two different directions.

>> *What was interesting about last night's episode was that gradually over a period of time through following the moment I lost touch with all I have learned about observing and how to combat the holding back to the extent that the negative process jumped in through the back door.*

Why were you going unconscious?

You apparently felt that you had something to lose. Are you aware of what that might be?

GREAT observing, Andrew. Keep working the situation and see if anything else surfaces about it.

John

John,

Hope you had a pleasant and productive time in Australia.

I continue to observe, but to add to this, I have been pushing out of my comfort zone. It's really been a pleasant month. The pleasurable aspect of it has been the unknown!

Never have I been able to say this. I have always desired control. Now

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I aim to let myself go, and to be honest, I don't know what I'm going to say from one minute to the next. It depends on the situation and the connection I have with the listener. I accept the fear coming up, but now that I don't take as much notice of it, it comes up less and less. It's gotten to the stage where I simply notice it's there but don't get caught up in it.

The person I am when I don't get caught up is remarkably different from the person I am when I'm in the fear and holding back! Your analogy of the nine-dot square and how to run four straight lines through it is really hitting home. I'm finding that to effectively deal with life, you can't be holding back. I have done speech therapy courses in the past and have worked hard to get fluent. But my ultimate aim was just to defeat stammering.

However, even though I could talk briefly, I kept having relapses because I was still holding back. Even though I *COULD* talk, ultimately this caused the relapse. "If you block yourself through your thoughts and feelings, you don't know if you can handle each moment: (from your manual)." What has really helped me is that when I talk, I don't see it as "I'm doing pretty good, I didn't stammer." I see it as "Well, what I just said reflected me through not holding me back. I have the right to be me!"

I have also begun a diary. Last night the pen felt like it was moving on its own. Observing is really helping, and your essay on "anatomy of a block" has been a revelation. It really highlights what's going on.

Last week I ran into some financial difficulties and began to hold back, Sunday evening my parents came to for a visit. This was a very interesting experience. I felt like holding back. The fear was there and had the potential to get out of hand to the stage of total panic. I knew this but didn't worry. Then it went away.

The thing was, because I had spent a few days holding back, I had lost touch with my own thoughts and feelings and struggled to find anything to talk about. I knew what was going on and didn't worry and was content to just handle the moment. My speech was ok. Again your "anatomy of a block" has been really helpful as it highlighted to me what you were holding back. When you did hold back you were not your usual self.

All for now John,  
Andrew

Andrew,

>> What has really helped me is that when I talk, I don't see it as "I'm doing pretty good, I didn't stammer." I see it as "well, what I just said reflected me through not holding me back. I have the right to be me!"

YEAH! RIGHT ON THE MONEY!!! Next step is to be able to say the same thing without adding "through not holding back."

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*>> The thing was because I had spent a few days holding back I had lost touch with my own thoughts and feelings and struggled to find anything to talk about.*

Good observation. Even a short period of holding back can move you into a different mindset until you have a cluster of experiences that moves you out of that mindset and into another, more positive one. Remember, your mindset has a big impact on your default setting (the behaviors and responses you automatically default to whenever stressful situations arise.)

Australia was great, but hectic. We did a lot in three weeks. Really enjoyed the workshop. Those people from Oz are certainly a wired bunch.

Nice hearing from you.

John

06 Sep 2000

Re: Keeping in touch

John,

Do you think a change in the season can affect your default settings? I have been finding this. I'm sure of it.

One last thing, do you think we become addicted to stammering? I have begun my thesis and wish to incorporate the fact that stammerers might actually be addicted to stammering as a coping mechanism.

Hope your wife and yourself are well and look forward to attending your workshop in Dublin.

Andrew

Andrew,

*>> Do you think a change in the season can affect your default settings? I have been finding this, I'm sure of it.*

I suspect so. In Chinese medicine, the seasons definitely affect one's mental state, and people often go to their acupuncturist to get rebalanced during those seasonable changes.

*>> One last thing, do you think we become addicted to stammering?*

I think so, although this may not be the best way to frame the question. I get hung up with the word "stammering," which is a combination of (1) the block, and (2) what we do to avoid the block. I think we become addicted to the strategy of holding back as a way to avoid unpleasant situations, because not to do so feels strange, even threatening, and ultimately becomes a difficult habit to break. What makes it particularly hard to break is that we're not aware that we're holding back. So the first step to recovery (as I see it) is to develop greater self-awareness of what we're doing while we SIMULTANEOUSLY push ourselves beyond our

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comfort zone.

>> *Hope your wife and yourself are well and look forward to attending your workshop in Dublin.*

I look forward to seeing you there. I'll be arriving in Dublin on Wednesday, so if you come in a bit earlier, maybe we can have lunch or dinner.

John

February 7, 2001

John,

Thanks for the reply. Been noticing a lot of interesting things with my speech recently. Just bought a new high speed cable modem and have had no end of problems configuring it! This has meant that I have frequently had to call the cable people to sort it out.

When I think I'm on the threshold of actually being able to use it, it doesn't work. Tonight I got everything set up but needed to call the company to give them some signal frequencies. My speech was absolutely terrible! – to put it mildly! – because I couldn't wait to give them the details in order for me to use the modem. The moment I was told the frequency was too high and an engineer had to call around in two days, my speech was fine!

Another little story. I'm very friendly with this Greek girl at University. One day while blocking, she said to me "Andrew, it doesn't matter how long you take. While you are struggling I'm not thinking anything about you as a person. I'm just trying to figure out what word you are trying to say".

Her words enabled me to see the wood for the trees – that I'm not the words I block on. This has made no end of difference to my fluency when I'm with her. I practically never block and feel confident now.

I have been trying to act as if. I saw a story about Bill Gates and realized how important his methods of convincing people were. Since then I have realized how important speech is and have just tried to live in the moment. I'm beginning to accept that I have this stutter a lot. And what I want to say is getting more important than how I actually say it. With this attitude the conviction in what I want to say usually carries me through block free.

Today in front of a seminar class of fifty I gave my opinion about some aspects of forensic psychology. I had an idea of what I wanted to say and threw myself in and put my hand up. The whole class turned around as they do to look at people who are brave enough to voice opinions, and I had to embrace all this. Crucially, the words just flew out along the lines of what I wanted to say. Actually, what I finally said was better than anything I could have thought about saying beforehand (do you understand this?)

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Regards,  
a

1 Mar 2001

Subject: Re: Keeping in touch

John,

How are things? Have you attended the McGuire program (full duration) yet? I have just finished my 10,000-word dissertation about stuttering. You know, sometimes I get good insights into my own stammering but other times I feel I'm still at square one! Years ago a speech therapist told me to stutter fluently and learn to accept myself as someone with this difficulty. I quickly relapsed but recently I have been doing this and hardly stutter!

Today I walked into Burger King and blocked because the person behind the counter was Indian! I blocked because often even when one talks clearly, certain foreign people have difficulty understanding what you say. When I was on the McGuire course, I would have enormous difficulty with Chinese and Indian people. If I got stuck often, they would just walk off! So there was tremendous time pressure. Today a similar episode happened. I wasn't at all embarrassed about having blocked and didn't think anything of it, and ultimately the words came out fluently!

When I go home to visit my parents is when my speech is awful. The environmental cues of being back home are sometimes too much and my speech quickly goes out of control. I have a fair idea why though. When you first began to overcome stuttering, did you just talk regardless of the fact that you might stutter, or did you control the stutter first? I'm getting to the stage where I just follow my instincts and just talk regardless.

Anyway, all for now.

Regards  
a

Andrew,

>> How are things, have you attended the McGuire program (full duration) yet?

Just attended my first training last week in Reno. It was terrific. Even better than I expected.

>> *When you first began to overcome stuttering, did you just talk regardless of the fact that you might stutter, or, did you control the stutter first?*

If you wait until you can control the stutter first, you'll never end up saying anything. The McGuire technique is about how to let go, even though you're feeling fear. It gives you a letting go technique to focus on

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whenever you feel the compulsion to hold back.

Dave McGuire talks about “killing” a feared word or situation by purposely going out and using the word scores of times until the situation doesn’t feel scary any more. I don’t know that there’s a substitute for this.

In my own case, whenever I approached the feared situation, if I felt blocked, I’d find tricks to get around saying the word. I would always start out with the intention to say the word without the tricks. I seldom backed out of the situation, because if worse came to worse, I could fall back on one of those tricks.

What helped me get past the holding back was not any McGuire technique (which didn’t exist in those days), but learning how to assert myself and to live with the feelings that came up. That was a by-product of all those personal growth programs I did. Whatever fears I had about looking bad were dealt with big time in those trainings.

*>> I'm getting to the stage where I just follow my instincts and just talk regardless.*

Way to go.

Nice hearing from you.

John

May 11, 2001

Re: Keeping in touch

Hi John,

How are things? I’m coming to the end of my psychology degree can you believe it? One month to go. Here the going gets tough. Right now I’m revising Forensic Psychology. I have completed a 10,000-word dissertation about stuttering, and a 10,000-word project about adolescent substance abuse. Trying to find 30 minutes these days is a difficult task!

Are you still very much involved with the McGuire method? I saw a documentary recently about it. Personally I haven’t attended a course since 1997, partly because the treatment stopped being fun. However I do believe that it has been by far the best treatment I have participated in. Perhaps in the future I will return.

Right now I’m not having much difficulty with the stuttering, although the symptoms fluctuate in accordance to the way I look at the disorder. When I accept and truly regard myself as someone who will occasionally stutter, I tend to experience the moment and react accordingly. When stuttering doesn’t fit in with how I want to view myself, then I have all manner of problems talking, never experiencing the moment perhaps through the constant anticipation.

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In the future I would like to take my studies further, although I have no plans but to wait to see how my grades are. I would very much like to visit America. I have been to Paris, Barcelona, Dubai but not the states. Perhaps one day when circumstances are more positively biased I will be able to visit the USA.

Can't think of anything else to add at the moment. (My head hurts too much from revision!) But take care and continue to experience new things.

Regards Andrew,

Hi Andrew,

*>> Are you still very much involved with the McGuire method?*

I'm still in touch with a lot of McGuire people. Currently trying to set up another workshop in Australia.

*>> Right now, I'm not having much difficulty with the stuttering although the symptoms fluctuate in accordance to the way I look at the disorder. When I accept and truly regard myself as someone who will occasionally stutter I tend to experience the moment and react accordingly. When stuttering doesn't fit in with how I want to view myself then I have all manner of problems talking, never experiencing the moment perhaps through the constant anticipation.*

I think that by now you have a pretty good handle on what's going in. Future progress will depend on getting out there and doing a lot of speaking, or perhaps, taking a McGuire refresher...or both.

*>> Perhaps one day when circumstances are more positively biased, will be able to visit the USA.*

Be sure to come to California when you do.

*>> take care and continue to experience new things*

Always workin' on it. Nice to hear from you, Andrew.

John

November 5, 2002

Hi John, long time no hear. How are you? Briefly, I have some very positive news! I no longer have any blocks that last more than three seconds. Rarely do I block.

I totally agree with your advice about expanding the comfort zone. I now get to the stage where I prevent the holding back even before it occurs. I have been trying to consciously change the many schemas I hold within my psyche. I have approached people in my past with whom I felt I had let myself down (many years ago). I have found that many of my schemas erode within minutes as opposed to trying to change through years of intellectualizing about a situation etc.

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I now have a customer sales job with a leading department store in the UK. I have a lot of information I want to document. I never knew life could be fun, I never knew a life outside the mentality of stammering. Boy, is the world a better place without it!! I would love to visit at some time.

Best Regards. Bye for now. Andrew

November 11, 2002

Re: Nice piece

Hi John,

Yes, great piece. From my own perspective you were always the lighthouse guiding the ships through the fog! I can't help having the desire to try to pull people through. A friend of mine has a stammer. What I find about him is that he seldom has an opinion about anything. He NEVER initiates a conversation. He just fills in the blanks, usually with a patronizing statement for the person who is filling the room with energy. I can't help but feel that there is a lot of arrogance with him and denial. I got so frustrated with this that I no longer see him anymore, and what a relief it is. If someone is primed to learn, then, like you, I have all the time in the world! Envy is also a big part with him.

The last three months have been a revelation and a time for absorption. Coming to terms with the fact 99.9% of the time I seldom block has been a great release. I have learned so much about playing the game of life!! Wow, what a difference it makes when I don't get in my own way.

All for now.

Regards,

Andrew

Andrew,

WOW!!!! That's fantaaaaastic! You're really a walking advertising for the power of a holistic approach, and for the belief that persistence pays.

Sure, come to San Francisco for a visit. It's worth at least a dinner or two and a personal city tour.

BTW, I thought you might like to read my keynote address to the BSA last September. It was about my own recovery. You can find it at [www.mnsu.edu/comdis/kuster/Infostuttering/Harrison/john.htm](http://www.mnsu.edu/comdis/kuster/Infostuttering/Harrison/john.htm).

Great hearing from you.

John

*[After this last message, I stopped hearing from Andrew. Then three years later, Andrew surfaced again on the neurosemantics list.]*

August 5, 2005

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Vicky,

It is my belief and my personal experience that stuttering doesn't "happen" to us. We MAKE it happen. As much as I know it FEELS like it is happening to us, WE are the ones who are tensing up in advance of words. This is a LEARNED behavior. And sometimes, even as you begin to reprogram your mind, the learned behavior will kick in as a conditioned response to various stimuli.

If we let this frustrate us, then we begin to recreate the pattern, and we lose confidence in the anti-stuttering stuff we've been working on. Remember, you've stuttered a ZILLION times over \_\_\_ years. You can't become perfect right away. Don't CATASTROPHIZE each stutter. You need to have a tranquil response to each block. Otherwise, your subconscious mind keeps learning that it is something to fear, to dread, to hate, to loathe. And it places too much importance on stuttering (which ultimately causes more stuttering). You can't spend your whole day worrying about your next block. (I don't know if you DO, but sometimes I sure did !) It's counterproductive and, ultimately, it is worse than the block itself.

Ask yourself if you would let anyone else treat you/talk to you about your stuttering the way you talk to yourself. IF the answer is "no," then start NOT letting yourself do it either! Be patient. You are undoing YEARS of learned behavior and conditioning. It takes time.

November 9, 2005

Subj: my story so far

Hi John,

I read your new correspondence and it was right on the mark if I can be so bold. What I have noticed is that I have opened up emotionally, relationships have blossomed and I've made many friends. But in my opinion the real work begins when you learn not to block.

I appeared to let life wash all over me and get other interests like meeting with friends, relationships with the opposite sex. One aftereffect of the stuttering is my self-esteem. At the moment my self-esteem is very low even though I don't stutter. Stuttering doesn't worry me at all, and I have forgotten a lot of the insights I had developed four years ago so this mail is being written from the heart and not through any perceptual experience.

I consider myself 10 years behind those who had no problem with their speech, so my mindset is gradually beginning to change to that of a normal speaker. I remember last week I was walking up a hill not thinking about stammering but thinking about the Thomas Harris novel, "Silence of the Lambs". One girl said "Hey, Andrew," and I replied, "Hey love, how's things?" without even thinking about it! Before I would have fallen all over

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myself to try to get the words out but nothing like this happened.

Life is tougher because I'm not protecting myself anymore by blocking. What I'm also finding is that I'm easily influenced and not at all assertive but that is something I can work on.

*>> "Musicians have the easiest time," said Doreen, the instructor who had taken me through the program. "They're used to working intuitively." Musicians know what it's like to give themselves to the music. They recognize the importance of surrendering to the experience, trusting their feelings, and not consciously controlling what they're doing. I guess you'd say that in those performance moments, 'the music is playing them.'"*

This is very interesting because now I'm giving myself to life. I live for the moment, and the words just happen. Jack Menear mentioned this but he said he'd never quite gotten there. I have gotten there, and it's frightening sometimes because you open yourself up to all sorts of emotions. In the past I received a lot of sympathy (because of the stuttering), but now I have to deal with people naturally and absorb their moods (maybe they have had a bad day, etc.) It amazes me how people without the blocking mindset can take speech for granted, but talk to them is cheap. To me, I treasure every day since I stopped blocking.

*>> He simply trusts that his mind and body will perform it, and as he plays, the music unfolds automatically in his mind like the perforated roll that controls an old time player piano.*

I must admit I am at that stage now. This is all I can offer for now, but I will set my mind in observation role and try to correspond with more perceptual insights. I am getting an Internet account within five days. (Right now I'm using the local library. and there is a time limit to the use of the computer.) I am glad to see that you continue to persevere in the field of stuttering and that we have a connection to correspond.

Thanks for replying John. I HAVE THE UPMOST RESPECT FOR YOU.

Your old friend,

Andrew Rees

PS I have changed address and have misplaced your book could we make arrangements to get another copy and could you sign it like you did before for me you said "To Andrew. Your search for the truth will take you far. 'I'm very upset about losing the book it was like a bible to me. I studied it everyday.

A

November 9, 2005

Wow, Andrew. You have made an amazing breakthrough. I'm really impressed that you're willing to move into this new territory and stay

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OPEN to the experience. I haven't met many people who have been able to attack their stammering as openly as you have and with your level of candor and commitment. You are truly paving the way for others.

In a way, I'm sorry that you're not sharing this on the neurosemantics list, as what you're saying has an enormous potential for impacting others. But you should know that I'm saving your emails and will at various times, with your permission, send selections to people I know.

You are so right in your analysis of what's happening. Without resorting to blocks to blot out what's uncomfortable, you're having to experience the "real" life that's been flowing under the surface.

*>> One aftereffect of the stuttering is my self-esteem. At the moment my self-esteem is very low even though I don't stutter.*

Ah, but now that you're in touch with all this, you can change it, and I know you will. The challenge is to live through your difficulties as they present themselves and build up emotional muscle. What will make that happen is your INTENTION.

When you run your life by your expectations, you give away your power to others. How people react to you and how events work out controls your self-esteem. Under such circumstances, it is easy to feel disempowered.

On the other hand, when you run your life by your intentions, you end up having a totally different response to things not working out. Each time your expectations don't work out, you simply know a little more about the problem. Then you reaffirm your intention to accomplish what it is you've set out to do. In this way, you continue to empower yourself. Of course, to do all this, your intentions have to be clear. That's been the biggest challenge in my life — getting clear.

*>> I have changed address and have misplaced your book could we make arrangements to get another copy and could you sign it like you did before for me. You said, "To Andrew. Your search for the truth will take you far." I'm very upset about losing the book. It was like a bible to me. I studied it everyday.*

Unfortunately, I don't currently have any copies of the newest edition on hand. And it would be very costly for me to print just one and mail it to you. Are you back in the UK? If so, the best way is to get a copy from the BSA. I can then send you the title page with an inscription. Or better yet, get the PDF version from me.

It's always a pleasure to hear from you. I'll be interested to follow your awakening.

All the best,  
John

*[This was written to the neurosemanticsofstuttering discussion group.]*

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November 23, 2005

Hi my name is Andrew Rees and my adventure with stuttering began at the age of fifteen. I had a torrid time with a tendency to hold back my emotions. I began on the David McGuire intensive course, which gave me my first breakthrough although I relapsed within three months.

I completed my degree in Psychology, I chose Psychology because I needed to find out what was going wrong. Every time I talked I had a panic attack, which led to all sorts of tricks and different methods to pronounce words. I'd bite my tongue. I had facial contortions and the panic of blocking was dreadful.

I began reading a lot into what John Harrison was doing in his book "How to conquer your fears of speaking before people". I began a correspondence with John, which began when I met him in London on a David McGuire function, and everyday I would carry a diary with me to note down every time I blocked. When I got home I'd study every block and why it might have occurred. With John's help we would dissect every block using John's Hexagon.

I have not blocked now for over eighteen months, and it's quite a relief, but I was so unprepared for what life without blocking would have in store for me. My social life began to expand as I made new friends. My experience was like getting up out of a wheelchair and walking again!!

Dealing with life without blocking has become nearly as difficult as life when I was blocking my emotions. One good thing I found was to watch films. A film that always makes me cry is "Schindler's List." What I would do if something negative had happened was to watch the film and release the emotions of what had happened to me during the day or week. For example, perhaps someone had laughed at my stutter or had no time to listen. I'd use the film to get in touch with the negative emotions I had felt because of stuttering. I really allowed myself to project my negative perceptions and emotions through the sad tale of the holocaust, FEELING what it was like to REALLY cry and get in touch with it.

I then became interested in laughter, so I'd buy DVD'S of the Marx Brothers and really allow myself to laugh! I hadn't laughed properly for years, and feeling what it was like really helped!! Blocking made me numb to almost everything life had to offer, so I found it important to take little steps by allowing myself to at least laugh and cry. This was my first step.

I began to see some pieces of the jigsaw. One time I had a job application rejected, and because I wasn't allowing myself to feel the rejection, my speech for two weeks later was appalling until I got in touch with what I was holding back (ANGER). I went straight down the gym and punched hell out of the poor boxing bag and wrote the company an assertive (not aggressive) letter asking why I had not been successful in having the job.

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I had already made up my mind that my job rejection was due to my speech. Like everything else that was happening during the day, anything negative or positive was due to my speech. I had gotten into the habit of rewarding myself when I was fluent and was really hard on myself when I stuttered through blocking. Now that I haven't blocked for a while I don't reward myself for being fluent anymore which I think is quite progressive.

Another observation was that other people (who don't block) didn't really mind how I spoke anyway because they, too, have a battle with everyday living. Okay, some people laughed, but it didn't really mean as much to them as it did to me. I got to the stage where I would speak but allowing myself to feel the panic and putting the fear to one side almost as if the panic was a distraction (read John Harrison's conversation with Jack Menear in John's book). What I discovered was that in doing this I would reduce the fear and talk without blocking. Many people rant and rave about fluency courses but to overcome stammering you need to understand the dynamics of what is going on. All the clues are in John Harrison's book as mentioned earlier.

My last words for now are-WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU REALLY CRIED AND WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU REALLY LAUGHED? Allow yourself to do this in privacy, but learn to recognize the emotions, feel the emotions and let go! The real battle for me now is living every day. I no longer think about stuttering, but life keeps me on my toes in every way. There are positives in stuttering too. I wouldn't have had a Bsc in Psychology if I had never had a speech problem.

One thing I did was put myself in a box – no relationships, no friendships anything to avoid talking. So get involved with life!!

All for now. Thank you for reading. Hope some of what I have written will make sense to someone.

Cheers,

Andrew Rees

December 9, 2005

To: neurosemanticsofstuttering@yahoogroups.com

Group,

I'd like to reply to a post I wrote last week when I blocked for the first time in two years. Well, little by little my confidence has returned, and I feel strong again, not in the sense that I'm fluent again but stronger and wiser after the whole episode! I'm wiser in the sense that I have learned to keep my hexagon in balance. I tied up all the loose ends, and I'm still prone to blocking. But what I can do is allow the feelings to be there and just notice them, put them to one side and continue the CONNECTION I have with the other person.

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John Harrison has taught me that connections with the person you're engaging with are invaluable and the connection will help you acknowledge the potential to block. Immerse yourself in the connection, smell the scent of the other person, notice what they are wearing, how do they look? KEEP THE CONNECTION. When these horrid feelings arise, be BOLD. Keep moving forward. Don't lose the connection.

In my view connections can easily be mastered when you allow yourself to live the ups and downs that life throw at us and as sure as night follows day, we will all have ups and downs.

I love dancing with life. My greatest fear was not relapsing back into the five-minute blocks but losing my connection to life!! Okay, things in my life could be better (financially), but I have plans to change this by initially volunteering with people with mental health problems. It might lead to a permanent job, which will be paid, but I'm not worried about the long term. I'm interested in what I can offer to people who might be in a vulnerable position.

Dr. Claire Weeks has some useful advice on how to deal with fear thoughts, and most of our thoughts in my opinion are the fear of blocking with no escape from the inevitable block. Dr. Weeks writes that when a fear thought comes by, FACE it, don't run from it! Accept the fear thought. DON'T fight it (allow it to be there). And finally, FLOAT past, DON'T LISTEN IN (to the fear thought), and finally LET TIME PASS. Continue dancing with life and continue feeling the connection.

Well that's me done for the day. I'm going to immerse myself back into the outside world and enjoy it!! Thanks for reading hope this makes sense to someone.

Regards,  
Andrew Rees

[After reading Andrew's post, Bob Bodenhamer, D.Min., webmaster of the neurosemanticsofstuttering discussion group, posted this essay for members. L. Michael Hall is a teacher of Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) and, along with Bob, is a co-creator of Neuro-Semantics]

**The Magic State of Acceptance**  
**by L. Michael Hall, Ph.D.**

"One of the most powerful influences on emotional health and well-being is the capacity to accept reality, to accept what is. The extent to which one can accept what is profoundly affects his psychological ability to adapt." – Joseph Dunn, Ph.D. Psychologist

One doesn't have to read far in the field of psychology to begin to

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realize the awesome power of acceptance. I learned this surprising secret very early when I came across a shocking quotation from Alfred Alder and then another from Carl Jung. Both said that you can never get over a neurosis until “you can love your neurosis.” My first thought was, “Love one’s neurosis?” You’ve got to be kidding! That’s the last thing I would want to do.

Yet it is in and through acceptance that we are healed, released, and freed for emotional health and well being. The use of the term “love” was used to attention to the absolute necessity of acceptance. In this, acceptance, as a key ingredient for effective coping and for mastering the challenges of life, acceptance surprisingly and paradoxically offers us one of the most powerful transformative tools. There’s hardly anything more profound in human nature than acceptance.

Now if this seems preposterous, remember that acceptance, as a transformative process has long been known. Consider the serenity prayer: “God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”

The word acceptance (from Latin and French) literally means, “to take, receive, or hold.” In accepting, we “receive with consent, give admittance, sometimes give approval to, endure without protest, regard as proper, normal, or inevitable, and receive as true.” The mental side of acceptance is to receive something into the mind for understanding and comprehension. The emotional side of acceptance involves welcoming something into our being.

### **The Paradox of Acceptance**

This is the paradox of acceptance. What we accept, we defuse and release. What we do not accept, but fight against and resist, we give energy to so that it grows. It becomes increasingly unmanageable, and controls us. The opposite of just accepting ourselves, life, the world, others, the constraints that we face everyday, the cards life has dealt us, is the first step to true mastery and empowerment. It is the first step, not the last.

The lack of acceptance leaves us unable to face reality. It undermines our ability to cope with the basic facts of what is . When we don’t accept something, we are rejecting, denying, repressing, and fighting. We pump our brains full of thoughts about nonacceptance. We do so with unrealistic expectations, impossible desires, and erroneous understandings that set us up for refusing to face things.

Acceptance is not resignation. Resignation refers to giving up or giving in. In resignation a person lies down and takes it. That’s not acceptance.

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Acceptance welcomes into mind and life with the purpose of effectively responding to it. In this, acceptance is not complacency or passivity, and it does not indicate the lack of high standards. Again, Dr. Joseph Dunn on this subject:

“Acceptance is usually the initial step and a critical one, in any psychological condition or symptom. Dealing effectively with depression, anxiety, conflict, or destructive habits begins with acceptance. Often the most difficult part of therapy is struggling with resistance to face reality.”

The lack of acceptance drives perfectionism. Conversely, acceptance of what is conquers perfectionism and other forms of mental and emotional intolerance. In the real world we find all kinds of ambiguities. We don't have neat categories of black-or-white compartments.

Acceptance is critical for relationships because without it, we go about trying to change the other. And that interferes with allowing each person to take responsibility for changing. Acceptance enables us to suspend our defenses and judgments that interfere with accurate perceptions. Relationally, the ability to live with differences depends upon acceptance.

Forgiveness is an acceptance grace. It enables us to come to terms with major hurts that we cannot just dismiss. Acceptance enables humor and laughter. Humorist Woody Allen illustrates the power of humor in acceptance, “I wasn't born a good looking kid, I didn't acquire these looks until later in life.” As part of the art of acceptance, humor, as a way to gain psychological distance, enables us to laugh things off.

We can accept without endorsing. We can accept a person without approving of everything that person thinks, feels, or says. Acceptance is part of contentment. Learning to accept life circumstances while fixing our eyes on values that have true meaning is essential for living a contented and peaceful life. Releasing what we cannot control makes for acceptance.

### **The Art of Acceptance**

- \* What do you have a challenge accepting?
- \* What problems or situations do you find yourself fighting against?
- \* What do you say “I can't stand...?”
- \* How well do you accept yourself with all of your imperfections and fallibilities?
- \* How well do you accept your world or others?

If acceptance is such a powerful and healing influence as a state and as a frame of mind, how do we learn it? How do we practice it? How can we develop more ready access to it and use it when we need it?

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The art of acceptance starts in the mind as a way of thinking about things and perceiving. It begins as we notice what we already “accept” rather than reject. It’s best to begin by thinking of something small and simple that you accept. How about the rain, traffic in a big city, lines at the airport, the baby’s diaper needing to be changed, someone has to take the garbage out? Think about something perhaps that you once did not accept, but rejected, hated, and found intolerable yet over the years, you have come to just accept.

As you think about something small that you accept, see and hear it on the theater of your mind until you step into that experience and feel it. When you do, notice how you are breathing, your muscle tension, your gestures, movements, voice, tone, eyes, face, etc. Take a snapshot of this experience of acceptance. To learn this even better, think of something that you definitely do not accept. Do the same with it, see and hear it until you step in and feel it then take a snapshot of that state. Are these different states?

Identify the language of acceptance and nonacceptance. When we don’t accept we typically utilize the language of the can’ts. – “I can’t stand to fail, that would be terrible.” “I can’t stand to be laughed at.” “I can’t tolerate having to wait.”

Of course, these are psychological can’ts, not actual limitations and constraints as in “I can’t fly.” Psychological can’ts drive our intolerance and nonacceptance and indicate frames of prohibition which taboo the experience under consideration. Now to undo the damage of prohibition, there’s a radical operation needed: we need to step up and give ourselves permission.

“I give myself permission to fail.” “I give myself permission to be human, fallible, to live in a fallible world, to make mistakes, to learn from them, to make the most of things,” etc.

Resetting your frames occurs as you give yourself permission. Simply continue to do so until it becomes a felt reality for you, until it becomes emotional acceptance. This is the power of changing our internal dialogue. Dr. Joseph Dunn writes:

“Real acceptance involves being open to emotionally absorb or digest what is. There is an absence of emotional defensiveness and avoidance.”

In the end, acceptance is just a state of mind-and-emotion. While there are spiritual traditions that have rituals that take years to achieve in terms of achieving acceptance, it doesn’t have to be that difficult if it is just a state. Nor does the “stages of grief resolution” have to be so long and hard. In Elizabeth Kubler-Ross’ analysis of the grief stages, a person moves from shock, denial, bargaining, depression, and finally moves on to (guess what?) acceptance. Yet if acceptance is just a mind-body state, why not just start there?

Every mind-body-emotion state is simply that – a state of mind, of body, and emotion. This gives us the “royal roads to state” of what we’re

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thinking and show we're using our physiology. That's why "thinking about a time when you had an experience of acceptance with something small and simple and noticing the state of your body in all of its dimensions empowers you with the ability to access acceptance and use it to set accepting frames of mind about other things.

To summarize the process:

1. Identify an experience of acceptance.

When have you just accepted something for what it is?

What do you now accept that once you fought, rejected, and hated?

How does your current acceptance improve the quality of your life?

2. Fully access the experience.

What do you see, hear, and feel when you recall that accepting experience?

How much do you feel the state of acceptance?

What would make it stronger for you?

What is it like in your body? Breathing, gestures, movements, etc.?

3. Set an anchor for this state.

Link some special word, gesture, symbol, etc. for this state.

Step in and out of the state until you can trigger the anchor and quickly get back into state.

4. Apply the acceptance to another area where you need and want acceptance.

What other area of life are you non-accepting, judgmental, intolerant, rejecting, resigning?

Trigger the anchor of your acceptance state and hold as you link that state with whatever you want to be more accepting.

### **Summary**

\* There's hardly another state as healing or freeing as acceptance. It powerfully enables us to adjust ourselves to reality for what it is and to then take the next step in moving forward in a positively creative way.

\* Ultimately, acceptance is just a state, which means we can use the tools and processes in NLP and Neuro-Semantics to access the state and use it to set new frames of mind about other areas of life where acceptance would free and renew us.

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December 22, 2005

To: neurosemanticsofstuttering

Re: Thoughts on "Acceptance"

Michael Hall in my opinion mirrors my recovery and was one of the best articles I have read since joining the neurosemantics group. A wonderful piece of work!!

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Embrace life, embrace Christmas (the terrible dinner, the socks or underwear you didn't need). See yourself as someone who stutters rather than a stutterer.

I have posted quite a few tools that I gained from a conversation with Jack Menear and John Harrison in John's book. Claire Weeks, Ph.D. writes:

- 1) FACE don't run when a fear thoughts comes by.
- 2) ACCEPT don't Fight (the thought that you might stutter).
- 3) FLOAT PAST. Don't listen in to the thought because if you do this you BECOME the fear that you are resisting.
- 4) LET TIME PASS.

Dr. Weeks didn't write this about stammering or stuttering, but she uses this method to overcome all sorts of anxiety, depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and this is what Jack Menear did to totally cure himself of stuttering. I use it, myself.

My hexagon has been rattled lately, but I have been keeping a diary and observing my blocks, and I feel totally free. [It's] the freedom that I have earned from addressing the factors that I was holding back from experiencing – for example, a relationship breakdown, moving into my parents house again at the age of thirty, giving up smoking, being rejected from job applications etc. All these factors I was holding back from, but when I let myself experience the emotions of these factors (I cried a lot, kept moving forward), I was fine. I felt stronger.

Every day I face situations that call for me to talk. I totally let go, and my speech follows, but I'm not holding anything back. Let me give you an example of the dynamics of a block (if I can be so bold).

The other night I went to my friend's house and we had coffee and talked for about 45 minutes. When it came to saying "goodnight" I asked him what he had gotten for his kids for Christmas. When I asked this, I was just about to hold back and block! WHY? Well, in my opinion I could hear his stepchildren upstairs listening, and I didn't want them to think that he was any less of a father to them than to his own children.

I noticed this immediately. I addressed it and moved forward and spoke, allowing these feelings to be there, and I was fine. No blocks, just me talking in REAL TIME [and] expressing myself.

I need to allow the potential to block to be there but ACCEPT IT, notice it, and put it to one side. (Easier said than done, I know.) It takes time to master it, but when you master it, you fall in love again with life. You fall in love again with yourself. YOU FALL IN LOVE WITH CHRISTMAS!

Don't let stuttering deviate you from what's happening in life. I remember the London Bombings on July 7. I was in London at the time, a quarter of a mile from one of the blasts. I was in Hyde Park, working and preparing the stage for R.E.M, the same stage used in the Live8 concert

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a week prior.

A week later I felt quite angry and allowed myself to get angry. So I went to the gym and did a workout and pounded the running machine with my feet. I was angry because I could have been killed that day! But had I not addressed this anger, I may have started blocking again. I was quite emotional, too because so many innocent lives were lost!

I have come a long way from my chronic stuttering days, days spent at home alone, shutting myself from the outside world. YOU CAN fall in LOVE with yourself again. You can FALL in love with reality, but in my opinion one does need to take baby steps.

Kind regards,  
Andrew Rees

February 22, 2006

Re: At the bank

John,

I went into the bank on Friday last week. Initially the bank was empty so I went to the customer services desk and not the tills. When I turned around in a matter of minutes a whole queue had formed nearly to the entrance of the door.

There were seven tills with optional use but only two cashiers. Everyone was waiting in the queue and were complaining, me one of them, not out loud but to myself. A lady in the bank is the mother of someone I used to know long before I began to get panic-based blocks, and her son I thought used to look up to me.

When it was my turn to cash some money, guess which cashier I was attended to by? Yep, you got it – the mother of this boy. Now seven times out of ten I can get my account number out, but on this day do you think I could do it? No. Not a chance.

I tried and tried, and when she could see my frustration she began to panic too! This had an adverse affect on me. The interesting thing about the whole episode was that I went into the bank with stammering not even on my top ten list of worries, and I was quite verbal at first with the boy's mother. I said, "Hi, how's the family?" Then it hit! I did not want her telling her son that I stammered badly in front of her because what sort of a role model would I be to her son if I couldn't even get my account number out. I've been through the whole episode and had a quiet laugh! So, first we have the build up of the queue, which rushed me. Secondly I was served by a mother of a boy that I know. And hey presto, I began to hold back.

All for now, take care John

May 2008

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You could have hit me for six the other day. After not blocking for two years, I blocked! It was a panic based block at the dentist whilst trying to say "January". I was a bit confused afterwards, because I hadn't thought about stammering for two years!!

To combat this I needed to look at what was going on in my life. Recently I have lost my job and had been rejected for six applications over the last few weeks. I'm giving up smoking, too, which is tough! Another element was that I just broke up with my girlfriend. I'd been living with her, and I was forced to move back to my parent's house. So then I was bound by their rules, whereas I have always had a place of my own with no boundaries. My girlfriend had apparently gone back with her old lover who used to abuse her.

To couple all of this I lost my mobile phone worth \$400, so I had to get in contact with the police and the insurance company. The insurance company was dragging their heels with regards to replacing the handset, which really stressed me out.

I had to pick up these pieces and deal with them. I rang the insurance company and sorted them out and a replacement handset is being sent to me, so this was no longer a factor. I called my girlfriend, and she has not gone back with her former abusive partner, so this (choosing someone else over me) was no longer a factor. I haven't found a place of my own yet but that will come in time.

Right now I feel right as rain – a few minor blocks until my confidence returns. When you block, REALLY feel the block. See what the block has to offer. Think on your feet give yourself a few extra vital seconds to compose yourself. When you feel what the block has to offer you, notice that you're still here living and breathing and with experience you learn to notice the block. Allow it to be there and keep moving forward.

Thank you for taking the time to read my input. Hope this will help someone.

Regards

Andrew Rees

*[Below is the last communication I received from Andrew.]*

January 17, 2009

Hope you had a good Christmas and New Year! Christmas here in Wales was pleasant and quiet. I thought I would keep in touch. It would be great for me if we could meet sometime in order for me to verbally express the difference you have made in my life :) are you in the UK this year?

At the moment I'm completing a group presentation on a section I created on Facebook. The name of the group is: "Imola '94.– The race that

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changed the legacy of Formula 1." [It's about] motorsport, and it's really an interesting process.

Imola is the name of the circuit in San Marino, and here Roland Ratzenburger and Ayrton Senna lost their lives (both collisions into concrete walls at 200 mph). Senna was the most talented driver I have ever seen (in 20 years) and, sadly, he left the track for no apparent reason.

Through years of evaluating what evidence was available I finally discovered the truth. By sheer neglect the FIA (Formula 1 association) allowed the track surface to degenerate, and, for cosmetic reasons, certain areas of the track were covered with new asphalt, layer on top of another layer. This made the track dangerous on the fastest corner of the whole formula 1 season, the corner known as Tamberello.

Senna on lap 7 of a 62 lap race (01.05.94 date) approached Tamberello at 200 mph. In '94 new regulations were introduced by the FIA to lower the down force of every F1 car, so, on this day all of the cars were riding millimeters from the asphalt.

As he negotiated the corner Senna's car touched the surface that had been re-layered and for a moment the car rested on its bottom. This event effectively acted like a ski, propelling his car in one direction into a concrete wall. The result: the death of probably the most talented driver of his generation.

Michael Schumacher eventually won the race, and it was on this day that the world prepared itself for the dominant Schumacher years. No one has taken responsibility. A court inquest focused on Williams (Senna's team), and many thought that his steering column had snapped, as Senna had it welded into a new, more comfortable position. Evidence shows that Senna had indeed tried to move the wheel as he approached the wall. So...Frank Williams (Team Boss) was not to blame. I believe that the FIA are ultimately responsible. Senna had been to the San Marino circuit three prior to the race complaining about the condition of the track!

I'm starting to write the rough draft of a book project. The project is entitled "I haven't brought this boy here for this". Through research, the book will focus on a psychotic episode experienced by a male in his middle 20s. This lad has abused illicit substances for a decade. The episode influences the young man to believe he is talking to God. But is he really talking to the Almighty?

God directs Paul on a magical mystery tour where he climbs 50 feet of scaffolding, jumps into a Marina fully clothed (these behaviors are thought by the central character to be defining behaviors that prove he is possessed by God and that chosen people would recognize this), and drives 300 miles to a pop star's house. Paul believes anyone famous has

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been touched by God through creativity, and that he and the famous are God's chosen people. The lad must get to a place of safety away from the unpredictable Satan people.

The final part of the project will focus on a nearby University where Paul actually believes that he is the reincarnation of Jesus Christ and that Steven Spielberg and George Lucas were waiting nearby to take him to a place of safety, i.e. Beverley Hills, California, where he has an arranged marriage to Meg Ryan.

What Paul doesn't realize is that he is psychotic. And when he returns from the University, having gone through three red lights, the police are out looking for him for dangerous driving offences committed on the journey home – the return journey from the pop star's house three days previously. On this fated journey Paul believes that he is given a choice between good and evil, i.e. inheriting the Earth or living amongst the famous.

The young man believes that Satan's people are insane and are just put here to consume. No one has any real intelligence, [they're] just morons going through the motion of life. Paul attempts to prove this by crashing into cars on the freeway at 80 mph, causing them to swerve up embankments. Now, the police are looking for him.

He is eventually tracked down to his flat, where he has just smashed his window to get in, (not realizing he left his keys in the ignition of his car with the engine still running nearby). Paul is taken to the police station where his blood is taken. The policeman comments, "Don't worry about this lad. Spielberg will look after him."

Paul believes this. Why wouldn't he? There is little conversation at the Police station, and Paul waits to be taken to safety with a police escort. What he doesn't realize is that the police are taking him, not to the airport and eventually to be amongst God's chosen people, but to the cuckoo's nest. The next morning Paul wakes up and allows God to talk through him. Words are uttered to the psychiatric nurse – "I haven't brought this boy here for this"

Has Paul had a psychotic episode? He has taken illicit drugs for a decade, remember, but who's to say that mind-altering drugs don't open up neural pathways, allowing a connection to God!

Sorry if the story ran on a bit, but I get excited when I write :) It might not be a credible story but it's my first, and I have done quite a bit of research into delusional thought processes, not to mention psychotic episodes.

In September I enroll into University again to do a postgraduate diploma in mental health nursing (two years). I'm also besotted by my Russian girlfriend Veronika.

Thanks for your attention and perseverance :)

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Take care.  
Regards  
Andrew Rees

*[This last email from Andrew was a landmark, because nowhere does he ever refer to stammering. He had finally moved on. He had made it through. His stammering problem had become history.]*

### **Epilogue**

In mid-2009, I received devastating news. I was informed by Andrew's sister that Andrew had passed away under tragic circumstances. I was crushed when I heard the news. I felt I had witnessed a heroic journey of self-discovery, and I was looking forward to seeing where Andrew would take his complex and challenging life. But alas, that was not to be.

Yet, Andrew's struggle and metamorphosis was not in vain. In his relatively short life, Andrew has left a powerful legacy to the stuttering world. No one has ever peered into the personal world of stuttering as deeply as Andrew and then documented his journey to recovery in such exquisite detail. It will be hard for any reader to avoid seeing the complex relationships between the many factors that comprise the stuttering system.

Andrew, we will remember you as a pioneer. In one of your emails, you talked of your desire to help others overcome their stuttering challenges. In this regard you have succeeded admirably. This journal will be read by many, and thanks to the Internet, it will undoubtedly outlive us all.

You have done well, my friend. Bravo to you for a life well lived.

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PART

7

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HOW TO CONQUER YOUR FEARS  
OF SPEAKING BEFORE OTHERS

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## PART SEVEN

In every poll conducted on what people fear most, public speaking comes in number one. I have personal experience with this because I have run public speaking workshops for the general public in San Francisco since 2001. I've seen hundreds of people stand for the first time and face an audience. Most are uncomfortable because they feel on the spot. They feel they have to perform, and their self-judgment kicks in.

But a funny thing happens. After a person has gotten up in front of the group a few times, it starts to feel ordinary.

Unfortunately, that's not always true for members of the stuttering community. Many of us are concerned with simply getting the words out. This can be such an overpowering issue that we never allow ourselves to relax and explore the public speaking experience.

But if we can stand in front of a group of PWS, our fears of blocking and stuttering can substantially diminish or even disappear, and we can feel free to relax and let go. We can learn what it's like to comfortably talk to an audience, so when we're called upon to do it in school or at work, the opportunity to speak does not feel so daunting.

In the early days of the National Stuttering Project, our San Francisco chapter would simply get together weekly and chat. That was great for a while, but then it got old. So we came up with a standard meeting format. People would discuss their experiences in the first half, and then in the second half each of us would have an opportunity to speak to the group without interruption. Once a person spoke, they would receive robust applause and then hear only positive feedback from the other members. Over time, a person would start feeling good about speaking in front of the group.

But eventually, even that started to get old. Chapter members wanted more.

That's when I had the idea to put together a public speaking manual for the NSP. I set out to observe what good speakers did that made them good, and over several months, I identified nine factors that had a positive effect on me. I then designed a simple exercise around each of those factors. These were combined into a public speaking manual entitled,

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*How to Conquer Your Fears of Speaking Before Others.* To this list of exercises I added an essay entitled, "On Overcoming Performance Fears." Copies of the public speaking manual were field tested in the NSP's first hour-long public speaking workshop at the annual conference in Philadelphia. Since then, the exercises have been used by NSP (now NSA) chapters all over the U.S.

They have also been adopted as an integral part of the McGuire Programme which runs 4-day trainings for PWS in a number of countries worldwide. What is particularly useful is that these exercises do not require a trained instructor to run them.

If you've never had fun addressing a group of people, then you've never known what you've been missing. These exercises can be a real eye opener. And they can help you significantly transform your Stuttering Hexagon.



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## SPEECH 1: Claiming Your Space

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**W**hen Danny Kaye was touring the world as a performer, he gave one particularly memorable show in London's Palladium theater.

Picture this: a packed house of 4,000 sitting breathless, their attention locked on the solitary figure framed by the huge expanse of stage. The stage at the Paladium is 50 feet from left to right, and Danny Kaye moved about as if he owned every inch of it.

In fact, Danny Kaye did own every inch of it.

He owned that stage so completely that during the performance he sat down on a corner of the stage, dangled his feet over the edge, and talked to that sea of faces as if he were chatting with them over 4 o'clock tea. He didn't act like he was on stage at all.

Compare this to how a typical person behaves before an audience. The average individual stays rooted within the same three foot "island." He acts as if the area around him has been mined, and the only space he dares to "claim" is the little tract on either side. No wonder people are uncomfortable when they speak. Wouldn't you be uncomfortable making a speech in the middle of a mine field, where a wrong step in either direction might blow you to kingdom come?

Sounds silly, doesn't it. But then why don't people use all the room they have available to them the way a professional performer like Danny Kaye does?

### *OUR SURVIVAL INSTINCTS AT WORK*

When we're up in front of an audience, some of us barely move a muscle.

At this moment, we're being controlled by a very basic survival instinct. If you were suddenly surrounded on the African veldt by a herd of rhinos, *you would tend to stand perfectly still so you wouldn't be a target.* Standing stock still is a natural reaction to danger.

But if you're on Fifth Avenue in New York on a fine Sunday afternoon, you wouldn't be rooted to one spot. No way. You'd be strolling along with everyone else, having a grand old time. When people feel relaxed and safe,

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they move freely.

So one way to tell your emotional, non-thinking self that everything is okay is to move about. Moving freely...claiming all the space you need to make yourself comfortable and in charge...is what this first speech is all about.

So much for the prelude.

You've found a topic you're comfortable with, preferably something that draws on your personal experience. Now you're standing in front of the group, ready to talk.

Don't rush. Take a moment and collect yourself. Get in touch with the way your feet feel on the floor -- make sure they're solidly planted. If you feel nervous, or if your legs or stomach are shaking a bit, just notice it. Do not try and contain this energy. You don't want to block it; you want to use it. You want to make it work for you.

Now begin your talk.

## *GETTING TO KNOW THE TERRITORY*

As you speak, allow your feet to carry you to one side of the room. Get in touch with what it's like to speak from this location. Does it feel strange to be standing to the side instead of in front of your audience? *Make it okay to feel strange*, and continue to find new places in the room from which you can talk.

Move as far away from your listeners as you can. Now move forward so you're almost on top of them. Are there some places in the room that are easier to talk from than others? Where are they? Which parts of the room are the most uncomfortable? If you do find yourself becoming uncomfortable, do not try and block out the feelings. Allow yourself to be uncomfortable and continue talking. Use every bit of floor space you can get your feet on.

If you're having difficulty speaking, do not stop yourself from moving. Allow your speech blocks to occur in every part of the room. Don't fight the blocks; just experience them.

Once you've covered all parts of the room, it's time to add the second part to this exercise.

## *YOUR TOUCH IS MAGIC*

As you talk from different places in the room, begin to place your hands on things: the sofa, the table, the doorway. Put both hands on the back of a chair and lean on it. Notice how that makes you feel. If it feels strange, make it okay. After all, this is not something you're used to doing.

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What else can you touch? Is there something on the table you can hold for a moment: a ruler, a pencil, a cigarette box? Pick the item up and allow your fingers to explore it before you put it back down.

Is there anything you can place your foot on -- a stool or the crossbar of a chair? Resting your foot on something is what people do when they're comfortable and at ease. *Notice how this feels.* If there's a little voice whispering, "You're not supposed to be this free and easy when you speak." -- simply notice that the voice is there. But don't stop speaking.

As you walk around the room touching things, you'll begin to observe that every place you stand and everything you touch is "yours." Not in a real sense, of course, but in an emotional sense. The things you touch become a part of you. Through touch, you've actually been transforming the area from foreign (and perhaps hostile) territory into friendly territory. You've been acting as if you were in the comfort of your own home. (After all, your home doesn't have "DO NOT TOUCH" signs posted all around...unless you live in a museum.)

Of course, although these activities will help you become more grounded, you'll probably still be experiencing a degree of tension. This is expected. Even after you become an experienced speaker, some level of tension will always be there. Let's see why.

## *DESTROYING THE OLD MYTH*

Most of us grew up believing that polished speakers are totally relaxed in front of an audience. Not true. When really good speakers and professional actors are before an audience, they're usually operating in a state of high energy and excitement. It's releasing this energy during their presentation that creates their charisma. Ask any speaker or actor -- when that feeling is missing, when they are too relaxed and low key, they give a lackluster performance.

Our point is that "creative" discomfort is desirable. The feelings come with the territory.

Remember when you were head over heels in love? Your heart fluttered. Your head swam. You couldn't sleep. You were really uncomfortable. "What's happening to me," you shouted. Then someone sang for you those familiar lyrics: "You're not sick, you're just in love."

Oh.

Most of us with a stuttering problem grew up with little tolerance for discomfort. We grew up believing that -- at all costs! -- we should stay calm and collected. So we learned to block out our feelings and pretend that we weren't really uncomfortable. One of our major tasks, then, is to begin to change how we regard the feelings that surface as we speak. We need to

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understand the differences between "creative" discomfort and "negative" discomfort.

### *THE BENEFITS OF BEING UNCOMFORTABLE*

"Negative" discomfort, the kind that debilitates us, is usually associated with *holding back* something that wants to be expressed.

"Creative" discomfort, on the other hand, is experienced when you *let go*. It comes with the release of energy. For example, actors are taught to use the tension that naturally arises in front of an audience. They use it to put oomph in their performance.

Let's review some of the differences between "creative" and "negative" discomfort.

*"Negative" discomfort results from resisting what is taking place.*

*"Negative" discomfort is fraught with fear and anxiety.*

*"Negative" discomfort tends to undermine your self-confidence.*

*"Creative" discomfort helps you to feel powerful and in charge.*

*"Creative" discomfort comes from heightening what is taking place.*

*"Creative" discomfort is savored as a moment of high excitement.*

Transforming your discomfort into something positive — actually learning to make it work for you — will be a major step in overcoming your fears.

### *HOW TO CONTROL YOUR AUDIENCE'S REACTIONS*

Another reason to claim your space is to prompt your listeners on how they should react to you.

Ever heard a speaker fluff a line, and then chuckle over his faux pas? Chances are if he felt okay about it, so did you. We all love those TV bloopers because the actors always end up giggling at their own mistakes.

But how about the senior giving a graduation speech who draws a blank and becomes excruciatingly embarrassed? It's a tough moment for all of us. We squirm in our seats. We catch our breath. We look away.

Why are we going through this number?

We're picking up the speaker's feelings...or what we imagine them to

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be. And we're making them our own.

Audiences take their cues on how to react by certain promptings that take place on stage. For example, if you notice in the movies, whenever the villain makes a threatening move toward the hero, the camera always cuts to a reaction shot of someone else. Has the leading lady flinched? Uh oh. She's worried, and we should be, too. What about the hero? Ah, hah! He's flashed a confident smile. He knows something we don't know. We can relax. To a large degree the audience is cued on how it should react by how the actors react. It is an instinct in all of us to pick up on other people's feelings.

When you move about and touch things, you're telling the audience that you're in charge. They become more comfortable, and this, in turn, makes you more comfortable. You have begun to establish a new, more positive cycle.

This theory is implicit in all the speaking exercises in this booklet. It is not your disfluency that the audience will react to, but how you feel about yourself as a speaker. If you feel okay, so will they.

**Follow-up exercise.** At the end of each speech there is a follow-up exercise designed to match your perceptions with those of your audience. This is not in any sense a test of right and wrong but simply a way of validating your own ideas about what took place. Very often, how we think we came across is not how we really did, and the only way we can get at the truth is to ask someone with a more objective point of view.

Here's the exercise. Once the speech is over, take a second to rate yourself on the chart found on the following page. How did you perceive yourself in terms of claiming your space by (1) walking everywhere you could and (2) freely touching anything you wanted to. Put an X at the appropriate number.

If you gave yourself a 10, it means that you "claimed" practically everything in the room. A 5, of course, would be average. And a 2 or a 3 would signify that you hardly moved around or touched anything.

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❖ CLAIMING YOUR SPACE ❖



**How I saw myself**    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10

Walking \_\_\_\_\_

Touching \_\_\_\_\_

**How others saw me**    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10

Walking \_\_\_\_\_

Touching \_\_\_\_\_

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Now ask your audience what their perception was. Start by asking how many people would rate your activities as a 1...then 2...then 3...all the way up to 10. And mark the scores accordingly.

How do the ratings compare?

Generally, when you first start out doing these exercises, you'll experience as exaggeration what your audience sees as barely adequate. Most of us are shocked to discover how far off our perceptions are and how much we underplay ourselves. Our fear of being different and/or looking strange keeps us from letting go and having fun. This feedback exercise is designed to bring your perceptions into alignment with reality and to give yourself more latitude in what you're willing to recognize as acceptable behavior.

Well, how was the experience? Did you survive it? Did you learn something?

Great! Let's move on.

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## SPEECH 2: Speaking Up

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**W**hy is it that so many of us are frightened by the sound of our own voice?

Maybe we're afraid of coming on too strong.

The average person has no problems talking animatedly to the neighbor over the back fence, but put him in front of an audience, and his voice is barely a whisper.

It's as if we have to compensate for being in a commanding position by toning ourselves down and pulling back. When you're in front of an audience, you're in a place of power. Acting forcefully in that role indicates that you really enjoy being there.

Most of us who stutter do not easily tolerate the feelings of power that arise when we face an audience. So we "balance ourselves off" by speaking in a thin, constrained voice. That way, no one can ever accuse us of taking advantage of our position.

So guess what this next exercise will provide an opportunity for?

Right. You'll have a chance to show off your power.

### *HOW WELL DO YOU HANDLE POWER?*

Before we get involved with your second talk, take a moment and reflect on how you feel about being in charge. Here are some questions you might ask yourself:

- *How do I feel about having others see me as strong?*
  - *Do I feel that others are jealous whenever I look powerful? (Clue: do I feel jealous or resentful when others act commanding and confident?)*
  - *Do I fear coming on too strong?*
  - *How do I feel physically when I experience myself as powerful? (ie:*
-

*Do my feet feel securely planted on the ground? What do my stomach...my chest...my throat...my face feel like? What do I notice about my breathing?)*

- *In a two party relationship, am I comfortable with the more dominant or less dominant role?*
- *Is it a relief to me when neither party dominates?*
- *What kind of a boss do I make? Do I gain people's respect? Do I let people walk over me? Do I feel relief when I can avoid dealing with responsibility?*

There are probably a dozen other questions you can ask yourself. But at the very least, take the time to formulate some responses to these questions.

If you can begin to recognize your hidden attitudes about power, the sudden emotions that crop up in “power situations” won’t seem like they’re coming out of the blue. You’ll begin to know what’s causing them.

The purpose of this talk is to experience what it’s like to increase your volume. This doesn’t mean that you’ll be shouting at your audience, but for this exercise, you’ll have to imagine that you’re talking in a room that’s ten times longer than the one you’re in now...and the audience is sitting at the very back of the room. To be heard you’ll have to speak up.

## *PRACTICING WITH TWO BATS*

To get an idea of how loudly you need to talk, there’s a little benchmark test you’ll first need to do at home. Talk for ten seconds in your normal speaking voice about what you did yesterday. Now say the same thing but double your volume. Now say the same thing a third time and double your volume again. How does that feel?

Do you have anxieties over how you’ll come across to your audience blasting out like this?

Do you cringe a little?

Then you’re at the right level.

On the other hand, if you think that speaking at this volume will be a piece of cake, *keep doubling the volume until you reach your level of uncomfortability*. Remember, you’re not trying to establish this as your normal voice. You’re simply trying to make it easier to talk in a bigger, bolder voice later on.

It’s not unlike the batter who takes practice swings with two bats before

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he gets up to the plate. By overloading himself initially, the batter feels stronger while he's waiting for the first pitch.

Now for your talk.

Find a topic you're familiar with. If you can find a subject that allows you to draw upon events from your own life, so much the better. You're always in a stronger position when you know more about the topic than anyone. ( After all, you're the world's authority on your own experience.)

Let's begin.

As you speak, notice your impact on the members of your audience. (In other words, stay CONSCIOUS!!!) Are they giggling because you're too loud? Are they glaring at you because you're coming on too strong? Probably neither. Chances are that your increased volume is simply drawing their attention. Increased volume has a way of communicating to someone that you mean business. Listen to any political speech. Nothing quiet about the politico at the microphone. He's the authority of the moment, and he's making the most of it.

If you're talking loud enough to feel uncomfortable, you may also notice that you're shaky. This trembling may extend to your hands, your legs, your chest, your voice — perhaps even throughout your body.

This is perfectly natural. You're experiencing the conflict between holding back and letting go. After you have more experience in letting go, the shaking will diminish. Meanwhile, don't fight it.

Also, you might want to vary your loudness. For contrast you may want to drop your voice, then bring it up for EMPHASIS.

How does it feel to make such a public show of forcefulness? Does it fit with who you are? If not, why doesn't it? Who said you always have to keep yourself in check? Who's saying it now? Whose voice has been whispering in your ears all these years? Start paying attention to all the "stuff" you've been feeding yourself.

**Follow-up exercise.** Were you as loud as you planned to be? Here's a chance to find out how far you turned up the volume...in the ears of your audience.

Rate your loudness on a scale from 1 to 10 with 10 being the loudest. If you do give yourself a 10, it's because you blasted them into the next county.

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## ❖ SPEAKING UP ❖



|         |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |    |         |
|---------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|---------|
| Softest |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |    | Loudest |
| 1       | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |         |

How I rate myself \_\_\_\_\_

How others rated me\_\_\_\_\_

Now ask your audience to rate your volume on the same 1 to 10 scale and compare the two.

What did you find?

Most people are startled to discover the substantial discrepancy that exists between how they perceive their volume and how others perceived it. In fact, what you may have experienced as unduly loud was probably perceived by your audience as simply exciting and energetic...and may have even elicited comments like “Wow, why don’t you talk that way all the time!”

Sometimes, those who do this exercise notice a substantial drop in the frequency of their stuttering blocks. That's a by-product of letting go.\*

*Cognitive dissonance* (the discrepancy between what you experience and what actually is) plays a big part in the integrated behaviors and attitudes that comprise stuttering. As you bring your perception closer to reality, you'll have taken another step in dismantling your stuttering system.

Now that you know what it's like to cut loose, don't stop. Try the talk again at another meeting, but turn up the level still more...to where the windows rattle. Make all your talks a little louder and more alive. Keep pushing back those barriers that say you have to contain your enthusiasm in a lackluster monotone.

It may take a few talks before you become comfortable speaking in a bigger voice, but if you keep at it, this new you will eventually be incorporated as part of your self-image.

\* Here's an alternative feedback technique that has worked well in workshops. If you're facilitating this process for another person, first have the speaker double his or her volume until it's at the level of uncomfortability. Then ask audience members to provide *real time* feedback by having them raise their hands whenever the speaker's loudness falls below the predetermined level. It's the job of the speaker to keep all the hands down while he or she makes the talk. This is a good technique for helping the speaker to keep his volume up throughout the entire presentation.

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## SPEECH 3: Adding the Music

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**L**et's review where you are so far. In Speech #1 you learned to take charge by claiming the space in front of the audience as yours. You talked from different parts of the room. You touched everything you could. You acted like you were Chairman of the Board.

In Speech #2 you practiced speaking up. By increasing the volume you gave the impression that you were not afraid to let go.

No doubt, you were totally uncomfortable trying out these new behaviors...perhaps drastically so. But at least for a short while you were willing to live with the uncomfortability. And if you really took a chance and extended yourself, you made some interesting discoveries:

- (1) People thought that you were more alive and forceful as a speaker.
- (2) What you thought was "coming on too strong" seemed to others to be quite within the ordinary.
- (3) You may have even found it easier to speak.

Let's look at another way to add excitement to your speaking.

### *WHY DON'T WE STUTTER WHEN WE SING?*

Ever notice how adults talk to little children when they want their attention?

To hold a child's attention you can't communicate in a monotone. Small children have a short attention span and are easily bored. Because their intellectual faculties have not had time to develop, it is usually difficult to get and hold their attention by appealing only to their mind. To be successful, you also have to appeal to their emotions.

There are two basic ways to put emotion in your voice. The first is to use volume. If you say, "Clean up your ROOM! And I mean NOW!", they'll get the message a lot faster than if you say in a monotone, "Cleanupyourroom,

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andI mean now.” Volume is the oomph. It’s what hammers at the gut.

But if you want to hold a child’s attention while you’re reading “The Three Little Bears”, it won’t do to shout. At best you’ll come off as a little weird; at worst, you’ll sound angry. A much better way to introduce emotion into your voice is by varying the pitch.

Think how unexciting it would be if you brought in the birthday cake with candles blazing, and then proceeded to sing “Happy Birthday” in a total monotone. Communicating in a flat voice has the effect of masking your feelings. But if you read “OnCE aPON a TIME there were thrEE BEArS”, allowing your voice to slide up the scale whenever you wanted to create emphasis, you’d be communicating to the child your feelings about the story. You’d even find that the more exaggerated your changes in pitch, the easier it is to capture and hold the child’s attention.

Want to know why we never stutter when we sing? In part, it’s because singing forces us to be emotional.

Variations in volume and pitch — two powerful vehicles for communicating feelings — are built right into the music. We can’t avoid them unless we sing in a monotone. (If we do sing in a monotone, it’s no longer called singing, but “chanting.”)

In fact, we’d look mighty strange if we didn’t follow the music the way it was written. So we’re motivated to let go...something that’s much harder to do when we talk.

## *MAKE EVERYBODY FOUR YEARS OLD*

Speech #3 is designed to give you the opportunity to EXAGGERATE your changes in pitch...exaggerating to the point where you feel *silly*.

To get in the proper frame of mind, imagine that you’re about to make your talk to a group of 4-year-olds. Now you know how 4-year-olds are: they fidget, they’re easily distracted, their attention wanders all over the place. In order to hold their attention *you have to make your talk just as if you were reading “The Three Bears.”* Everything you say has to be overly exaggerated...in fact, it must be carried to a level of UNCOMFORTABILITY.

This is going to sound bizarre, especially when the subject of your talk may be, “How to tune up a Mazda RX-7” or “New developments in high level computer programming.” Imagine talking about either of those subjects in the same voice and with the same inflections you’d use if you were reading a nursery story.

But this is exactly what the exercise calls for.

Again, keep in mind that if you don’t exaggerate your fluctuation in pitch to the point of uncomfortability, this exercise will not be very helpful to you.

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If you're ready, look for a subject you'd like to talk on. Make it something you're comfortable and familiar with. As always, draw as much as you can from your personal experience.

## ADDING THE MUSIC

Now, the talk.

Take a moment to ground yourself before you start to speak. This means standing without saying anything for a few moments to check out how you feel. Notice your emotions. Notice how your body feels. Notice your audience. LOOK at them. *Don't allow yourself to go unconscious!*

Begin to speak. As you talk, allow your voice to change pitch constantly. Dramatize anything that could *remotely* call for emphasis. (Imagine how dumb it's going to sound when you say, "The APPLE MACbook PRO has a TWO point TWO GIGAhertz INtel core PROCessor and FOUR GIGAbytes of inTERNal MEMory" But say it anyway.)

Notice how you feel about speaking with this much inflection. Do you feel silly? Stupid? An object of ridicule? Do you feel that you're not being yourself? Are you wondering what other people are thinking about you? Do you find that you've suddenly slipped back to talking your old way...and not even realized it? Above all, *stay as conscious as you can* of what it's like to be in the experience.

When you conclude your talk, take a moment to enjoy some well-deserved applause.

**Follow-up exercise.** Now rate yourself on the chart. On a scale of 1 to 10 (with 1 being "total monotone" and 10 being inflection carried to a totally exaggerated level), where would you place yourself?



Feedback

### ✦ CREATING THE MUSIC ✦

|                     | Complete<br>monotone | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | Totally<br>expressive |
|---------------------|----------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|-----------------------|
| How I heard myself  |                      |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |                       |
| How others heard me |                      |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |                       |

Done? Let's find out how this compares to the way others experienced you. Start by asking how many people saw you as a 1...then a 2...all the way up to 10.

How does this match up with the way you saw yourself?

It would not be unusual to see yourself as having spoken at a 8 or 9 level, while those in the audience rated you only at 3 or 4. Chances are this is the

same kind of discrepancy you found when you made speeches 1 and 2.

What does this say?

It says that in order not to offend anyone, you've been down playing your forcefulness. Years ago, you were probably afraid of coming on too strongly, so you began to hold back. Over time, this began to feel ordinary — the way things should be.

But you know the real tragedy? You sold yourself a bill of goods. This isn't the you that people want to meet. This is only a held-back version of the real you. The irony is that if you could only let go and be yourself, you could make it easier for others — your friends, relatives, even the strangers you meet — to let go and be themselves. But nobody may have ever told you this...until now.

Does this mean that you want to go around talking to adults as if they were 4-year-olds? Hardly. That wasn't the purpose of the exercise.

Occasionally we have to exaggerate an action before we can truly experience it. The purpose of the exercise is simply to give you a strong taste of what inflection is all about...and to offer a glimpse at how safe you've been playing it. You can put a whole lot more expression in your voice before you go beyond the bounds of "normal" speaking behavior. And by increasing the music (and emotion) in your voice, you'll be more fun to listen to.

Hopefully, you've found this an enlightening experience. But you've only just begun. You need to continue to experiment — to "swing two bats" until the experience of modulating your voice becomes ordinary. Keep practicing talk number three until you can comfortably double or triple the amount of inflection you normally use.

And continue to notice whether adding more emotion to your voice makes it easier to speak without blocking.

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## SPEECH 4: Learning to Live with Pauses

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**B**ack in the 1950's one of the most popular wake-up radio shows in the New York area was hosted by a couple of madcap personalities named Bob Elliott and Ray Goulding. "Bob and Ray", as they were known to a wildly appreciative audience, were a grab bag of different characters and comic situations.

They did one running skit that's painfully easy to relate to if you stutter. It was called "The Slow Talkers Club." A typical situation might cast Ray as a reporter interviewing Bob, the president of the Slow Talkers Club. Bob's pauses between each word are maddeningly long. In desperation Ray keeps trying to fill in the right word, and it's always hilariously off in the wrong direction. For example.

RAY: Who's running the meeting tonight since you're not there?

BOB: The.....vice.....

RAY: President? PRESIDENT???

BOB: ...squad.....busted.....the.....club...so we're...not...meeting.

Pretty amusing.

Except if it happens to you.

Those of us who grew up with a stuttering problem have learned to detest pauses, because we've always associated a pause with a lack of fluency. We try to fill every moment with wall-to-wall words. Every half-second pause feels like an eternity. WE HAVE TO KEEP TALKING!!!

But do we?

Pauses can be very useful, even long ones. Ask any actor who's spoken words like, "Gentlemen.....the King...is dead." How much more dramatic it is than if he'd said, "GentlementheKingisdead." Pauses are used for emphasis as well as for dramatic effect. The national leader who looks out at his audience and cries, "We shall...never...ever...give up!" is playing that audience for all he can. It's not hard to imagine your response to all this. It's probably something like, "Sure, but that's not my problem. When I pause, it's because I'm blocked. I can't talk."

Maybe so. Maybe so. But one of the reasons why we block is that

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we're triggered into a state of panic by our own natural pauses. The moment we stop, we tighten our speaking muscles, hold our breath and take other counterproductive measures that interfere with our ability to communicate.

The best, and perhaps only, way to become comfortable with pauses is to try them out. Speech Number 4 is designed to give you this opportunity.

### *CREATING YOUR OWN "DEAD AIR TIME"*

As usual, the way to really get to know something is to exaggerate it. In this speech you will be enrolled as a member of the Slow Talkers Club. This means that everyone is EXPECTING you to talk slowly; in fact, it's the norm.

It will help if you choose a subject that triggers some strong personal feelings so the pauses can be used to heighten dramatic effect. But if you can't find such a subject, then any topic will do.

About the pauses. They have to be lonnnnnnnng. Between three and six second each...or even greater. Of course, you can vary them, making some pauses more extended than others.

As to how frequently you should pause...make it about every three or four words. At the very least, you should program in enough deliberate pauses to make it seem unnatural.

Want to hear how such a talk might begin? Here's a sampling:

"I.....am.....PLEASED.....to be here.....on this....MEMORABLE  
.....occasion.....to SPEAK.....to you.....on the.....joy.....  
of growing.....watermelons."

You get the picture.

### *STAYING CONSCIOUS AND AWARE*

A question that may come up is, "What should I be doing while I'm pausing?"

What you DON'T want to do is look up at the ceiling or out into space. That's what those who stutter usually do when they block.

What you DO want to do is establish strong eye contact with members of the audience. While you're in the middle of a long pause, LOOK at someone. Look at SEVERAL people. After all, this is your show, so you might as well have some fun with it.

*Notice how it feels to be this deliberate.* Observe how it is to control the "dead air time" as they say in broadcasting. Make those pauses as long as you like. In addition, stay in touch with your body. What do your feet feel

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like? How does your entire body feel when you consciously and deliberately set the pace?

*“TIME IS RELATIVE.” - ALBERT EINSTEIN*

After you’ve made the talk, get some feedback. Specifically, what you want to discover is how your audience experienced the longevity of your pauses. (By the way, the actual text of your talk must, out of necessity, be shorter than your other talks, since you’re stretching it out. No fair going on for 30 minutes, as one enthusiastic NSA member did.)

On a scale of 0 (for shortest pauses) to 10 (for longest), find out how many people saw you at each level. Start at zero and work your way up.

| Feedback              | ❖ LENGTH OF PAUSES ❖ |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |              |
|-----------------------|----------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|--------------|
|                       | Very<br>short        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | Very<br>long |
| My experience         |                      |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |              |
| Audience's perception |                      |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |              |

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Ah hah. You’ve discovered the theory of relativity. Time is perceived differently, depending on where you are and what you’re doing.

Here you believed that each of your pauses lasted light years. Your audience saw them as...well...maybe a little long (if that!) This seems to be the experience of most of us who have consciously tried to speak with pauses.

To make it okay to pause, you have to alter your beliefs about pauses and your perception of time. You’ve been conditioned to believe that you had to avoid pausing at all cost. Not only is it not true...it’s not even desirable!

When you make this talk again, extend your pauses even longer. Get used to looking at the audience and saying nothing. Make it *your* choice. Then, when you find yourself in “real life” situations, pausing will seem ordinary and nothing to get up tight about.

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## SPEECH 5: Look 'em in the Eye

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**E**ver wonder why PLO leader Yassir Arafat used to always appear in news photos wearing dark glasses? There was an interesting article about that in the papers. It seems he wore dark glasses so that in his dealing with people, his eyes wouldn't give away what he was really feeling.

The eyes tell a lot. They're the windows through which the soul communicates.

Have you ever watched two lovers holding hands, totally oblivious to the world as they gazed at each other's...noses?

Of course not.

They were looking into each other's *eyes*. That's where the action takes place.

Some very specific things happen within the eye which relate directly to the emotions. For example, when you're feeling soft, trusting and expressive, your pupils dilate. In fact, some so-called aphrodisiacs do nothing more than dilate the pupil to artificially create this nonverbal cue. As long as you avoid looking the other person in the eye, your interchange with him (or her) loses a measure of intensity.

It's easy to observe the importance of eye contact in the animal world. Just watch whenever two male dogs meet in the park and one wants to prove he's dominant. If the other dog does not want to challenge, he'll avoid eye contact with the first dog.

### *ESTABLISHING CONTACT WITH YOUR AUDIENCE*

Eye contact serves as a bridge over which emotions travel between you and your listener. Therefore, avoiding eye contact is a way of keeping yourself detached from the speaking situation. Your body may be there, but *you're* not.

What's the fear?

It could be the fear of being judged. Or a fear that you're looking foolish or coming off too dominant.

Or an uncomfortability about getting too personal.

Eye contact brings these feelings to the surface.

Many of us who stutter are frightened of feelings. We tend to be overly

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controlled. Therefore, we see involvement (eye contact) as forcing us to give up some of this control over our emotions.

True, if you don't invest your emotions in the speaking situation, you have less likelihood of being hurt.

But there's a catch.

Without your emotions, you have no power, no strength, no presence. You're just a bunch of words.

Speech Number 5, then, focuses on two things. First, of course, you'll work on eye contact. And secondly, you'll be observing your feelings as you involve yourself in eye-to-eye contact.

### *PRACTICE VISUALIZING*

You'll want, first of all, to look for a subject that you really feel like speaking on. Then there's a little exercise to practice for a few minutes each day during the week before you make your talk. It's an exercise in visualization.

Sit yourself down in your favorite chair, and take a moment to get centered. Close your eyes, and picture yourself standing before the group as you prepare to speak.

Before your imaginary talk begins, allow your eyes to meet the eyes of several members of the imaginary audience. Really look at them. *Picture how it feels to be in contact with your audience.* Now continue the fantasy and begin to make your talk.

In your mind's eye, as you speak, let your eyes wander to other members of your group. Talk directly to one person for three or four seconds. Then let your eyes move on to another person. If any emotions come up, don't block them out. *Simply acknowledge the feelings* and refocus your attention on what you *want* to experience. Allow yourself to experience how it feels to talk to an audience that *wants* you to be strong and forceful and in command. See yourself touching every member of the group with your eyes. Don't focus on fluency. Instead, focus on what it would feel like to be confident. *What is that feeling like?* Picture the audience really responding to what you have to say. Then mentally conclude the talk and allow your imaginary audience to give you a hearty, enthusiastic round of applause.

Do this exercise as many times as you can before the meeting. Keep doing it until you have a clear sense of how you want the experience to *feel*.

Get yourself so fired up, so ready for this wonderful experience that you can hardly wait for the meeting date to come around.

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## MAKING THE TALK

You've visualized as much as you could. Now it's the day of your talk. You're standing before the group, but before you begin speaking, there's one more visualization exercise that will help boost your confidence. Most of us who stutter see our audience as judges. It's as if we dress them in black robes and powdered wigs. No wonder the audience seems intimidating. However, visualization can help here, too. For example, before you begin, you can mentally remove their "black robes." In fact, you can mentally remove their clothes altogether, and while they're in this embarrassing position, confidently establish eye contact with your audience, and ask yourself—"Who's in the commanding position now?" Or better yet, simply imagine they are there to totally support you, which by and large, audiences want to do anyway.

When this image (or any other image that gives you a sense of being in charge of your "space") is fixed in your mind, go ahead and make your talk, just like you pictured it in your mind. As you speak, *don't worry about being fluent*. Simply duplicate the confidence, the positive emotions and the excitement that you experienced in your imaginary practice sessions.

**Follow-up exercise.** Did you establish rapport with your audience? Let's find out. After the talk is over, take a moment to rate yourself on eye contact. Then ask your audience how they experienced you. Get a show of hands for each level on the scale. Remember, "0" is no eye contact at all, "5" is pretty good, while "10" indicates you really connected with people.

### ❖ FREQUENCY OF EYE CONTACT ❖

 Feedback

| None |   |   |   |   | Constant |   |   |   |    |
|------|---|---|---|---|----------|---|---|---|----|
| 1    | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6        | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

Your experience \_\_\_\_\_

How others saw you \_\_\_\_\_

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How'd you do? Make note of what you *felt*. What emotions came up as you talked? Was it scary being in direct contact? Were you able to feel in command? Did you look away when it became too uncomfortable? There are people who can maintain total eye contact, even during a long block. This says they are not afraid or apologetic because they stutter.

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Your listeners will take their cues on how to relate to you by how YOU relate to you and how willing you are to stay connected. When strong eye contact tells them you feel okay about yourself, they'll see you as okay, too.

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## SPEECH 6: Letting Your Feelings Show

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**W**hen was the last time you blew up at someone?

For many of us who stutter, the answer is, “Never have.”

If there’s one thing we’ve learned in life, it’s that it’s safer to hold back what we feel. Instead, we opt to be *nice* so everyone will like us.

“What, me angry? That’s absurd. I’m perfectly fine. Now...how high did you want me to jump?”

No wonder so many of us feel manipulated. We’ll do anything to prevent losing control. Anything. We’ll sell out our ideas, our beliefs, even ourselves. Often, our ability to block our feelings is so automatic that we never even recognize these feelings exist.

The problem is – an emotion doesn’t go away just because we hide it. Emotions correspond to biochemical changes inside our bodies. When we’re stressed, our bodies respond in a “fight or flight” syndrome. Adrenaline and other biochemicals shoot into our blood stream to provide us with the strength and stamina to meet the crisis. This added “shot” was required by primitive man to help him survive the physical dangers of a prehistoric world.

The caveman burned up these chemicals by fighting the beast or running away. But what happens when you and I get upset and can’t release our energy through physical action – like blowing up at someone, playing a hard game of tennis or a taking an hour to calm ourselves through meditation?

Here’s the bad news.

These chemicals recycle in your body *for as long as three weeks*. If you don’t release these energies, you literally stew in your own juices.

Let’s look at what this has to do with speech blocks. Speaking before others is traditionally a stressful situation – for everyone! And that includes people who have never had a stuttering problem. As you anticipate the dangers of talking (i.e., you’re next in line to give your report), your body begins to marshal its forces. Your blood chemistry changes. Your heartbeat increases. Your body is preparing itself for a crisis; literally getting ready to

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explode into action.

Now, if you are afraid of releasing this energy as you speak, then you must divert part of your effort to keeping it under control.

People contain their emotions in any number of ways. They get headaches. They get ulcers. They get tight backs and shoulders. They block by “forgetting” what they were going to say. But if you block your energy by tightening the muscles in your larynx, lips, tongue, and throat, or if you hold your breath, you’ve created an additional problem.

A person can talk if he has a tight back muscle. It doesn’t interfere with his ability to communicate. But a person who has locked his vocal cords together cannot create a sound. His fear at not being able to speak then becomes an *additional* source of stress, which prompts more blocking which prompts more stress which prompts more blocking, etc.

The cycle has become self-perpetuating.

Although the fear of blocking *does* become a stimulus for more blocking, the *original* reason you hold back may not have anything to do with speaking per se. It may relate to not being able to release the pent-up fears that surface when you confront an authority figure. Or the hurt associated with being rejected. Or perhaps the person you’re talking with reminds you (subconsciously) of the kid on the block who bullied you when you were five years old and defenseless. Or just being in front of others recalls a similar childhood situation where you were judged and felt rejected.

Often, it’s hard to get in touch with these feelings. But one emotion – anger – does seem to be easier to conjure up when a person puts his mind to it. Through anger, you can begin to explore what it *feels* like to express strong emotions as you talk. All you have to do is find a topic or personal experience that makes you mad...and then make a conscious decision to let it show.

## *LETTING GO*

To prepare for Speech Number 6, you need to find a topic that gets your dander up. Now think really hard. Was there a time when...

- you were accused of something you didn’t do?
  - the kids laughed at you because you talked funny?
  - you were pushed around by someone bigger than you?
  - you got a speeding ticket for going just five miles over the limit?
  - the Internal Revenue Service audited you for no good reason?
  - somebody dented your brand new car?
  - someone took your parking spot?
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Or maybe you're angry because...

- our policies are all wrong in El Salvador.
- the painters did a terrible job on your house
- inflation is doing you in.
- you want to buy a house and can't get a loan.

Whatever it is, you probably don't have to look too far to find something that triggers you. This injustice, this rotten deal, this gripe, this... whatever...will be the subject of your talk.

In presenting your subject, find as many *concrete* real life experiences as you can. If you're angry at people who steal your parking place out from under you, be ready to describe the last time it happened. Think about that %\$#@&\$!! so-and-so who did it to you. If you feel your government throws its weight around in foreign affairs, be specific. Pick a country, a news report, an event that really illustrates what you're talking about. Come to the meeting prepared to blast 'em with both barrels.

### *IT'S FUN TO GET MAD*

Now for the actual talk. Once you're standing in front of the group, take a few deep breaths. BIG breaths. The kind of breaths people take when they're really livid. Oh boy. You're going to really do it this time. The world's going to find out what you really think.

Now start with a bang. Say something that really sets the scene. Something concrete. Go for the jugular.

"Don't you HATE it when some rotten  
hair-brain writes graffiti in  
spray paint all over a public building.  
Just the other day I was walking  
past the city museum...our beautiful  
city museum...and...can you believe this...  
some cretin had written 'Kill the pigs.'  
in big black letters right across the  
beautiful marble entranceway. They ought  
to lock this guy up and throw away the key...."

Don't spare the language. You're really MAD. AAAArrrrrrgh!!! Let it show. Remember...feelings are contagious. Get your audience to feel what you feel. Get 'em riled up.

You may not know it, but audiences LOVE to get angry. And they'll love

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you for giving them the chance to let off steam. So make it okay for them to get mad. Give 'em a target – something to hit against.

If you've ever been to an old style melodrama, you know what great fun it is to hiss the villain. Why do we love it? Not because the villain has personally injured us. But because he is symbolic of all the others in the world who have done us in. He's a straw man we can all beat on...with no consequences. It's all okay.

If you're *really* going for it, you can make the speech more exciting with a little extra oomph. Take a few sections of the daily newspaper and roll them into a club. Now find something...a chair, a footstool, an old telephone book...that you can hit. (Make sure you check with whomever is hosting the meeting to make sure it's okay to beat on this object.) Now, wind up and whomp that (e.g.) footstool each time you want to really emphasize your point.

“I HATE people who finish my sentences.  
(whomp!) What do they think I am...  
STUPID? (Whomp!) I am SICK and TIRED  
of acting like it doesn't bother me. I'm  
going to speak up and let them know (whomp!)  
what I think.”

Like that.

Begin to notice whether it isn't really kind of fun to get mad. Hey, you don't have to be Mr. Nice or Miss Proper. Not all the time, anyway. It *is* okay to blow the image every once in a while and be loud and explosive and downright ticked off.

**Follow-up exercise.** Now for a bit of a shocker. So you thought you were coming off as The Incredible Hulk? Let's see just how angry you did come off. This is the time to poll your audience. A “0” means your last name was Milktoast, while a “10” means you blew 'em out the window. Go up the scale one number at a time, and get a show of hands. How many saw you as a “0.” As a “1.” As a “2.” All the way up to 10.

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## ❖ LET YOUR FEELINGS SHOW ❖



|                    | Totally mild |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |    |  | Firebrand |  |
|--------------------|--------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|--|-----------|--|
|                    | 1            | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |  |           |  |
| Your experience    | <hr/>        |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |    |  |           |  |
| How others saw you | <hr/>        |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |    |  |           |  |

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Of all the exercises in this manual, this is traditionally the one where people who stutter are most shocked by the results of the audience feedback. Usually, there's a three or four point spread between our self-perceptions and how others see us. Typically...

When we felt we were angry, others saw us as annoyed.

When we felt we were enraged, others saw us as angry.

When we felt we were overbearing, others saw us as forceful.

When we felt we were loud, others saw us as energetic.

We tend to be so frightened by coming off too angry...too powerful...too strong...that we've adjusted our perceptions to give ourselves a huge margin of error.

So pay attention to what you experienced during that talk. Was it hard to let go? Did you feel foolish? Weird? Out of character? How *did* others see you? Maybe you should begin to examine your beliefs about what *is* appropriate behavior.

The point is – it's okay to speak with strong feeling, not just with anger, but with *any* kind of emotion. You may even discover a delightful by-product; namely, that we who stutter as a rule experience fewer blocks when we allow those feelings to surface...when we actually *use* those feelings to give our speech vitality.

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## SPEECH 7: Stuttering on Purpose

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**O**boy. This is the speech everyone hates. Doing the thing you've been trying to hide all these years really goes against the grain.

So why bother to do it at all?

Why go public with THE GREAT SECRET?

The guru sitting on the rock said it best: "You are what you resist." He means that if you want to get rid of a problem, you first have to embrace it. Accept it. Make it part of you.

Only then can you begin to let it go.

### *SOME PROBLEMS CANNOT BE SOLVED*

We keep thinking we can SOLVE our stuttering as if it were some kind of math problem. We think we can make those speech blocks disappear by dealing with them as if they were not a part of us but something "out there".

There's no way you can do that.

True, you can *seem* to make a behavior disappear by focusing hard on *not* doing it — as is suggested in "fluency shaping" type programs — but unless you carry this process one step further...to where you also dissolve the "glue" that holds the problem together...the behavior tends to return.

Why?

Very simple. To solve a problem, you have to continue to recreate it. (Otherwise, you have nothing in front of you to work on.) Therefore, — and here's the great irony — the harder you try to solve your stuttering problem, the more you're establishing its presence.

It's a real Catch-22.

Does that mean that problems can't be solved?

Not at all.

Many kinds of problems can be solved. You *can* figure out that tricky algebra equation. You *can* come up with a solution on how to reorganize the corporation. Or where to vacation next year. That's because you're not trying to make the algebra problem, the corporation, or your vacation disappear.

But when you want something to disappear, such as your stuttering,

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you have to take a different approach.

To “disappear” something you don’t solve it.

You dissolve it.

This not just playing with words. There is a world of difference between the two approaches.

## *SOLVING VS. DISSOLVING*

When you solve a problem, the subject continues to exist, although its form may be altered or disguised.

When you *dissolve* it, the subject disappears because you have dismantled it. (Rather like what you did as a child when you took apart the “car” you made with your Leggo set and put the parts back in the box.) You have disconnected the parts so they no longer interact. You have removed the problem by destroying its structure.

To illustrate:

10-year-olds Tom, Dick, Harry and Johnny comprise a gang that’s continually in trouble. You want to curtail their activities. How do you do it?

You’ll probably have only limited success if you deal with them as a gang. That’s because there’s a chemistry between them that spells trouble. The more you deal with them as a gang, the more you confirm the gang’s existence. And the more you reinforce its behaviors.

But if you induce them to join a youth group and get involved in other activities, the Tom, Dick, Harry and Johnny gang becomes dissolved into a larger setting. The structure that defines their gang no longer exists. The “parts” become dismantled and reassigned to other areas. The gang...and the problem...have disappeared.

Now what does all this have to do with stuttering?

Just like fighting the gang reinforces its presence, focusing on the speech block -- resisting it, fighting it -- only further entrenches it within your psyche.

Since you are what you resist, maintaining an attitude that says, “I will do anything rather than stutter in public” only makes sure the problem stays with you for a long time.

So what keeps you stuck? In part, it's the reluctance to experience the feelings that come up when you block; feelings like fear, shame and embarrassment.

Doesn’t it stand to reason, then, that the issue of stuttering (not the stuttering, itself, but the perception of what's really going on) could dissolve (disappear) into a larger context if you can (1) allow yourself to experience the feelings, (2) explore whether these feelings are as intolerable as you

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think they are, (3) discover that allowing yourself to "have" the experience gives you a measure of control over it and (4) be open to the other non-stuttering related issues that may also affect what's going on.

You may find that your stuttering is really the product of a constellation of problems, including difficulties with self-assertion, a confused self-image, a reluctance to express what you feel, bad speech mechanics and so forth. Seen within this context, what you thought was simply a speech problem may be transformed into a different set of issues.

### *HAVING FUN WITH A SPEECH BLOCK*

No doubt you looked at the above heading and said "No way! That's like having fun while the dentist is drilling your tooth."

Surprise!

If you get fully involved, you can have fun doing anything, even blocking. By blocking on purpose, you can (perhaps for the first time) develop a feeling of control over what you've been doing, and maybe even develop a clearer idea of what comprises a speech block.

After all, speech blocks are not something that happen to you. They're something you DO. They involve specific muscle movements and behaviors. And if you're like most people who stutter, you have a very unclear idea of what these behaviors are.

The purpose of this speech is to block on purpose; openly... consciously...deliberately. Instead of escaping from each block as quickly as possible, you want to give yourself the luxury of extending the block as long as you can make it interesting to do so. In fact, you want to exaggerate...not downplay...the block. You want to strrrrrrrretch it out so its shape, form and character become totally clear to you.

You are going to resist doing this. But before you go into armed rebellion, it will be helpful to answer these questions:

- Has your group ever seen you block before?
  - Have they ever seen you REALLY block?
  - Will your audience be upset if they see you making prolonged blocks?
  - Even if your audience isn't upset, will you still be upset?
  - If the answer to the previous question is yes, why will you be upset?
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- What do you have to lose?
- What's really in the way of your doing this exercise?

### *THE REAL ISSUE*

Because we have spent so much of our lives trying to pass for “normal,” what is really threatened by this exercise is...our self-image. When we really get down to it, what we're most afraid of is not appearing “normal”.

But here's the twist. The people in your support group couldn't care less whether you stutter or not.

*You're* the one who cares. Because you're trying to look good.

To *you*.

The moment you are willing to give up your old self-image, you make possible incredible opportunities for change. What this speech is about is learning to expand your self-image to include your occasional disfluent self.

This will free you from being locked in a two-position game of being either “normal” or “abnormal”. These are not meaningful labels, and they force you into a corner. In fact, the fear of “being abnormal” may well be the key to your resistance.

Learning to block on purpose allows you to broaden your self-image to include *both* your fluent and disfluent self.

And it gives you a wonderful feeling of being in control.

### *BLOCKING AS AN ART FORM*

Now the speech. Find a topic; in this case it doesn't have to be a topic you're familiar with. Any subject will do — something you can talk on for two or three minutes.

Before you begin, explain to your audience that at the conclusion of your speech, you want them to applaud in direct proportion to how well you blocked. The more dramatic, prolonged and exaggerated your blocks, the longer and louder their applause should be. Then tell 'em it's your intention to bring down the house.

There are three things you want to concentrate on — (1) style of the block, (2) duration of the block and (3) frequency.

*Style.* Whatever you normally do when you block on purpose, exaggerate it. If you squeeze your lips together over “b” or “p” sounds, *really* squeeze your lips together. And while you're doing that, push like mad to get the air out.

Really strrrruggle.

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By the way, you don't have to be deadly serious about this. If you want to add a little comic relief now and again, stop a moment, go "phew!", and return to the struggle. Or find some of your own amusing ways to accentuate and exaggerate the block.

If you're in the habit of using devices such as snapping your fingers to get you through a block, work up a rhythm with finger snapping. Syncopate it. Play with it. Have fun with it.

While you're blocking, stay conscious. *Don't fog out.* Get in touch with how it *feels* to block on purpose. And look at your listeners - really look at them - while you block. Get good eye contact.

*Frequency.* This is a chance to make up for lost time, especially if you're a person who doesn't normally block much. You need to find out what it feels like to block on every third or fourth word. This is the opposite of hiding. So be generous with your blocks. Block a lot.

*Duration.* You will undoubtedly have to remind yourself *not* to rush through this exercise. The tendency will be to get it over with as soon as possible. That runs counter to what you want to do.

Because this is an exercise in awareness you need to remain in the experience for more than two microseconds. So make the blocks last. Stretch them out. This will give you a chance to feel the block all the way through. We always try to quash the experience, to cut it off, so we never get to really know what the block is about. Try and duplicate *exactly* what you do when you block.

When you block on purpose, *you* are in control. So exercise this control. Find out how good it feels to be holding the strings. Sure, your heart may be pounding away. You may get all flushed. And you may feel silly and...dare we say it...stupid. But you won't look that way to your audience. They'll be totally impressed with your ability to walk straight into the lion's mouth and take charge.

When you're done, step up and enjoy some well deserved applause. If you really went for it, you *will* bring down the house.

## *ONE MORE THING TO DO*

There will be a tendency to be so relieved this exercise is over that you'll want to shove it out of your consciousness and into the cosmic void.

Don't.

Remember, you're trying to alter your attitudes about your own disfluency. So whatever you felt, whatever you experienced, make it a part of you. That's the route to a broader, more all-encompassing self-image. An image that allows you to be comfortable with yourself no matter what you do.

To assist you in remembering the details, after you get home write down

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everything you can remember. Recall what was easiest and what was hardest. What was really funny. What attitudes and self-concepts were challenged by the exercise. In the days that follow think about and reflect on the meaning of what you experienced.

And above all, acknowledge yourself for doing something that 99% of all those who stutter would never have had the guts to do.



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## SPEECH 8: Using Your Body

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**T**his exercise has to do with making yourself more relaxed in front of people. In fact, you've already practiced some of what we're going to do when you made Speech Number 1 and "claimed your space."

As you know, there's nothing more wrenching than being still when you're nervous. It's not by chance that the expectant father is always pacing in the waiting room. If he had to sit quietly, he'd probably give birth, himself.

So what does the typical person do when he speaks in front of others? He stands still. Perfectly still.

He doesn't move his legs.

He doesn't move his arms.

He doesn't move any part of his body.

At best, he white-knuckles the podium, holding it in a death grip while his emotions fight unsuccessfully for release.

That's doing it the hard way.

It gets back to that genetic tendency we all have to stand still in the face of danger. It makes absolute sense not to move if an angry bull is passing nearby. You don't want to call his attention to you. But think how contradictory and defeating it is to give a talk and at the same time act as if you didn't want people to notice you.

You're cancelling yourself out.

You're trying to be visible and not be visible.

And this situation - where two forces pull you in opposite directions — is exactly the kind of circumstance that encourages you to block.

### *LETTING MOVEMENT LOOSEN YOU UP*

The purpose of Speech Number 8 is to discover the fun of moving your body while you talk. You'll do this by making a "how to" speech.

A "how to" speech is one that explains how to do something. How to service a car. How to build a fence. How to swing a golf club or fold a parachute. How to give a good massage.

Obviously, there is no way to do justice to any of these topics without demonstrating what you're talking about. That means you have got to

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move.

You want your listeners to develop a strong, clear visual picture of everything you're saying. They should be able to "see" that golf club in your hand or the car you're working on.

The only way you can communicate these images is to act out the activities as if you were actually doing them. The more fully you act them out, the clearer these pictures will be.

## *MAKING THE SPEECH*

To be really effective, it helps to exaggerate your movements, so use lots of "body English." Pretend that your audience is half a mile away and the only way they can see your actions clearly is if you make each motion a little larger than life.

What's your speech topic? How to unclog the bathtub drain? Great! Make sure it has lots of action. Make sure it's a topic that has movement running all the way through the speech.

For example, if you're describing how to cook up a great Mulligan stew, pantomime getting the pot out of the cupboard. Where is the cupboard — over on the right? Walk over to it and open the door. How many people are you going to serve? Two? Ten? Make sure that people have a sense of how big the pot is as you carry it over to the counter. Now talk to us about the kind of ingredients that go into the stew and demonstrate how each item should be cut up. (Incidentally, don't forget to wash the vegetables before you put them in the pot.) When the stew is ready to go, put it on the stove and cook 'er up. If you're the kind of person who likes to sneak a taste while the stew is simmering, show us how you do it. Dip your imaginary spoon in the pot and scoop out some of the good stuff. Now run it under your nose and take a deep whiff. Mmmmmmmmmmm, that's straight from heaven. Now sip it, and smack your lips at the rich, pungent flavor. *Give us the experience! Get us to see what you're doing.*

By the time your talk is over, your listeners should be dying for a dinner invitation.

## *WHAT DID YOU EXPERIENCE?*

Was it fun to talk and move at the same time? Most people find it a bit strange, only because they're used to standing still and gripping the podium or hiding their hands behind their back.

So it may have felt unnatural. But it was probably more enjoyable. When people are comfortable, they move. You moved; ergo, your psyche got the message that things were okay.

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There's no follow-up exercise to this speech, because whatever insights and experiences you needed came from doing the exercise. Other people's feedback won't be of much help. This speech was simply designed to loosen you up physically and suggest that you don't have to stand still like a frightened deer when you talk to people.

Body English helps people let go. Try using your hands, your arms, your whole body the next time you speak. It really works.

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## SPEECH 9: Interacting with an Audience

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One of the best advertising campaigns to come along in a decade is AT&T's "Reach out and touch someone." In one poignant TV spot filmed in France a young man is saying good-bye to his family on the platform of a train depot. From all appearances, this will be a long separation. The parting is tearful. Steam from the locomotive swirls and clouds the young man as he hugs his parents. Then he's gone. But not totally and not forever. Time moves forward. The phone rings at his parent's home. It is the son calling. He is reaching out, beyond an ocean, beyond a country, to touch the people he cares for.

Telephoning long distance can break down geographic barriers. But there are other barriers as well; for example, the psychological distance that exists between the speaker and his audience.

One of the best ways to break down this barrier is to reach out and actively involve yourself with your audience. How? It could be anything from asking questions on your speech topic to conducting man-on-the-street interviews with members of your audience. Not only does it warm up the room, it's actually fun because you're engaging your listeners on a personal level.

### *THE POWER OF REACHING OUT*

Most speakers isolate themselves within a protective cocoon. They're so petrified of the audience that they erect a barrier that allows their voice through but little else.

If you do this when you speak, you've noticed how alone it makes you feel. All alone and isolated in front of your listeners.

Speech Number 9 offers you a technique to break out of this cocoon, a way to make the speaking experience warmer and more personal.

Those of us who stutter have always tried to depersonalize the speaking experience because it was painful. We didn't want to feel the feelings any more than we had to. We didn't want to be in contact with anyone while we were experiencing those godawful blocks.

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So we retreated. And that attitude, that holding back, is exactly what helps to create and perpetuate our speech blocks.

But we *can* make speaking fun by putting the personal contact back in — on our terms! — under circumstances in which we maintain control.

We can do this by finding ways to interact with the audience. Remember Monte Hall on “Let’s Make A Deal.” Monte did nothing but interact nonstop with his audience for the entire 30 minute period. If he’s wasn’t paying \$50 for someone’s fountain pen, he was offering to trade a contestant’s \$1000 winnings for the goodies behind door number three.

You may have noticed how comfortable everybody appeared. Even though the contestants were dressed in outrageous costumes and acting in ways that would make their kids cringe, nobody seemed self-conscious. They didn’t have time to be, because they were caught up in the bantering, nonstop give and take with Monte Hall.

That’s what audience interaction does. It gets both the speaker and the audience involved with each other. It helps you lose your self-consciousness. It makes speaking more fun.

Interacting in a personal way with your audience may be scary to you. That’s only because you may have never done it before.

## *GETTING IN TOUCH WITH YOUR POWER*

When you throw questions to the audience or encourage them to participate in other ways, you’re in a powerful position. So it will be important to stay aware of how this makes you feel.

Typically, those of us who stutter have mixed feelings about our own power. We’re both attracted and frightened by it. We fantasize what we’d do if we spoke fluently. We see ourselves getting things done, running our lives efficiently, perhaps even being a leader. Yet, when faced with an opportunity to play a more powerful role, we hold back.

Maybe someone won’t like us.

Maybe someone will take offense because we’re “trying to run things.”

We have such a large investment in being nice that we hesitate to risk upsetting others by “intruding” into their space.

So playing a more authoritative role with your audience may make you uncomfortable. There’s nothing wrong in that. What you simply do is *choose to have those uncomfortable feelings* if they come up during Speech Number 9. Then you can really feel like you’re controlling the whole experience.

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## SELECTING A TALK

There are several different kinds of talks involving audience interaction. We'll give you a few examples.

*Question and answer.* This one you're already familiar with from your years in school. The purpose of this talk is usually to educate your audience. One way to get them involved is to have them "fill in the blanks", so to speak. Audiences are inclined to sit back and allow the speaker to do all the work for them. It's easier. This isn't to say that they wouldn't want to become more involved. It's just that inertia is hard to overcome.

To get your audience more involved, you need to find questions that stimulate response. Questions can relate to...

- a) **Information** — "Does anybody know which is the largest river in the world?"
- b) **Human nature** — "If I drew a pistol on you right now, what would you do?"
- c) **Perception** — "Look carefully at this ink blot. What do you see?"
- d) **The future** — "What do you think would happen if the world ran out of fossil fuel?"

You want to provoke your listeners. You want to get them to interact with you. The intimacy that results will help reduce your self-consciousness and increase your spontaneity. You'll also notice that each time you stop and ask another question, the energy level in the room jumps up one more degree. That helps when attention begins to flag.

*Physical involvement.* This moves you one step beyond simple questions and answers. It calls for listeners to actually get up out of their seats and do something. This may seem scary. After all, if you've traditionally erected a wall between you and your listeners, you're now bashing down that wall. You're relating on a much more personal level. You're really setting yourself up as being in command.

How can you get members of the audience to help with your presentation? Choice of subject plays a big role. Speeches that call for audience participation might include...

- a) **Demonstrations.** Are you giving a demonstration on how to
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properly fold a flag? You'll need someone to hold one end.

- b) **Magic.** Any magician requires a helper to pick the card, cut the rope, or look under the cup for the ball that's never there.
- c) **Man-on-the-street interview.** This is an old favorite. Get the person to stand while you interview them. It'll give you a greater sense of being in charge.
- d) **Using people as a visual aid.** For example, if you're giving a talk on relieving tension, you might want someone to stand up so you can demonstrate where the most common tension points are located.

You get the idea. There are literally hundreds of ways to physically involve your audience.

### *CHALLENGING YOUR SELF-IMAGE*

Speech 9 can challenge the way you've traditionally seen yourself, because it encourages you to really connect with the audience. If your image has been that of "the stutterer who sits quietly and never disturbs anyone," then personally interacting with your listeners will probably stimulate a little voice that says, "I'm not being myself."

But is that true? Are you really not being "you?"

It depends on what you mean by *you*.

If you mean the constricting self-image you created that tells you who you *should* be, then it's true. You're not being that "you." But if by "you" you mean the person who's just chosen to have fun with the audience, then of course it's the real you.

How do you know?

Because anything you do, even when you feel like you're play acting, is an extension of the real you. Otherwise, you couldn't have done it.

Each of us builds a self-image that tells us "who we are." This picture of ourselves helps to orient our life and give it focus. Anything that challenges this image we perceive as a threat to our well-being. (*Check it out. When we're unsure about who we are, how do we feel? Anxious and confused.*) However, a self-image that's too narrow to accommodate the full sweep of our personality imprisons us. It forces us to curtail our activities so we may continue to act in character.

On the other hand, if we can broaden our self-image to accommodate all the different sides of us, even the sides that we are reluctant to show, then

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it's entirely possible to play all these roles *and be comfortable doing it*.

Each of these talks will ask you to step outside your comfort zone and try something new. This may initially make you uneasy. However, these feelings of uncomfortability are entirely appropriate. You simply need to practice the exercises over and over until the behaviors become familiar and you become used to seeing yourself in these new roles. Only then will they become a welcome and acceptable part of the "real you."



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## SPEECH 10: Inciting People to Action

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If you were watching ABC-TV in October of 1988, you may have caught an hour-long show celebrating the career of a unique 39-year-old named Dar Robinson. If you bumped into Dar at the supermarket, you'd have pegged him as a typical suburbanite, you know, the kind of guy who works downtown at a white collar job; a stock broker, maybe, or a rising young executive. A regular kind of guy with a wife and two kids. Someone you'd want at your next barbecue for his engaging manner and quick smile. If pressed further, you might have cast him as someone whose greatest excitement came from coaching Little League or shooting a round of low-80's golf. Except Dar was anything but ordinary. At 39 he was Hollywood's greatest stuntman.

Dar was the daredevil who hurled himself out of a 16-story office building in Burt Reynold's movie, *Sharkey's Machine*.

Dar held the world's record for making the highest jump sans parachute (311 feet) into an air bag, a notable event filmed at Knotts Berry Farm in California. His stunts were truly extraordinary, and when he wasn't being paid to risk his neck, he went seeking his own challenges, such as jumping from the top of North America's tallest structure — Toronto's Canadian National Tower — attached only to a slim cable that arrested his fall.

Why mention Dar? Because he was one of that small group of people consistently willing to venture outside their comfort zone. Most of us go the other way. We put our lives on automatic, settle into our safe, predictable world and do what we can do maintain the status quo.

Consequently, if we're making a speech whose purpose is to move people to action, we have to find ways to pull...literally blast!...people out of their comfort zone. And as you've probably already discovered, this is no mean feat.

### GETTING PEOPLE TO CARE

Think back to when you were a kid. Remember the time you wanted your parents to buy you the guinea pig or the Ronco Super Zapper Gun or the really expensive Barbie Doll with the six complete outfits?

What worked?

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The secret was to get your parents to care enough to take an action. You had to *enroll* them in your desire. Understand that your parents were quite comfortable with the fact that you didn't have the pet, the gun or the doll. You had to make them uncomfortable about it. You had to push them out of their comfort zone.

This is exactly what our final speech is about — shaking people out of their complacency, making them care enough so they're willing to take an action.

To incite people to action, you first need to find something — an opportunity, a cause, an issue — that you care deeply about. What might that be? Here are some typical issues your audience might be motivated to act on.

- Contact local schools about putting up an NSA poster and/or helping to promote National Stuttering Awareness Week
- Write their senator or congressman about any issue of importance.
- Make a donation to a particular charity.
- Get everyone to sign a personal contract in which they agree to do something for themselves that they've been putting off.
- Take that weekend vacation they've been constantly postponing.

You get the idea. Whatever you choose, find something that you're stirred up about *right now*. There's an almost ironclad rule that nobody will care any more about an issue than you do. So you're the role model. If you want to make believers of your audience, then you need to demonstrate that you're a believer, too.

## *YOUR BELIEFS GIVE YOU POWER*

People tend to be herd animals. They move in the direction of the pack. Every charismatic leader in history from Ghandi to Hitler to Roosevelt knew this. This isn't to say that the average Joe sitting next to you on the bus doesn't have definite ideas about whether his son should be driving the family car or whether his daughter should be dating at fourteen. He does. He may even be concerned about the environment, nuclear proliferation or other issues of the day.

But there are just so many things he's willing to expend his energy on. And everything else...that is, everything that doesn't impact him

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personally...he's willing to relegate to others.

Consequently, your strong opinions and beliefs give you enormous power. If you can translate your message into terms that are personal to your audience and allow your conviction to sweep them away, you've empowered them to take an action. Then you just need to tell them what to do. Remember, your belief adds credibility to the cause. Your enthusiasm and belief are infectious. So look around for something you feel inspired about, something that needs doing, and make that the subject of your talk.

### *MOTIVATING PEOPLE TO TAKE AN ACTION*

Any good salesman can tell you that there are two basic parts to making a sale: first you need to creating the desire, and secondly, you need to deal with resistance. Now, resistance can take several forms. There is the resistance that comes from being *afraid* to do something. For example, the thought of doing this speech will undoubtedly bring up a certain amount of resistance that will show up in inner dialogues such as...

"I don't need this added stress. I'm dealing with enough right now."

"I'm not ready to try this yet."

"This is a stupid exercise."

"I'm too busy."

There is also the resistance that comes up because a person is having a hard time justifying something he or she wants to do. All of us a familiar with the inner voice that says...

"But I really don't *need* a third TV."

"There are too many calories in a double scoop Rocky Road ice cream cone."

"I really *shouldn't* stay up and watch the 1 a.m. movie on cable."

This is why enthusiasm is so important when you're trying to get people to act. Your logical arguments can give them the "reason why" to do something, but it's your *enthusiasm* that gives people the strength to set aside their fears. It diverts them from worrying about themselves by making something else more important.

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When people care, they are willing to act. Just think about the father who jumps into the river to save his child from being swept downstream. Would he normally risk his life that way? Not unless he were Dar Robinson, and even Dar put himself at risk only after weeks and months of preparation. But the child's father has made something more important than his own fears. That caring is what fuels his efforts.

So how do you get people to act?

As we mentioned, you need to find something that *you* care about, and then find ways to communicate that caring to your audience. How do you do that? Well, for one thing you don't want to stand rigidly before your audience, arms clamped to your side, and talk in a monotone. *That* won't allow them to feel what you feel. You'll be more persuasive if you...

- Make yourself comfortable by claiming your space
- Speak up so your energy can come through
- Heighten your emotion by adding inflection and pitch to your voice
- Create drama by adding pauses
- Look 'em in the eye so they know you mean business
- Let your emotions show.
- Stutter on purpose to really demonstrate that you're in command
- Use your body to create emphasis
- Interact with your audience to break down the barriers

In other words, this is the speech in which you can put to use everything you've learned and practiced in this manual. It's your chance to really have fun with speaking, and to discover that the only limitations you have are the ones you place on yourself. So pull out all the stops, and don't forget to have fun.

## *DID YOU MAKE THE SALE?*

Let's see whether your message got through. Of all the speeches in the manual, this is the toughest one to get results, because you're asking your

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listeners to make the supreme sacrifice. You're asking them to get out of *their* comfort zone, so don't feel badly if there wasn't a single person who whipped out his checkbook or signed up to slay a personal dragon. After all, if you could actually turn around an audience in a few minutes to where they were ready to act, you'd be much in demand as a speaker and already making a healthy six figure salary.

However, let's find out what effect you did have. Maybe you turned their apathy into mild interest. Or their mild interest into curiosity. Even if nothing happened, that's fine, too. You simply need to discover whether anything you did had an effect.

Rather than rating this exercise on a scale of 1 to 10, you're going to simply ask people to place themselves in one of four categories. Either they were (1) unmoved, (2) mildly interested, (3) strongly interested or (4) persuaded to take an action. So read them the four categories, ask them to choose which one fits their response, and record how many voted in each category.

### ❖ Inciting people to action ❖

 Feedback

|                  | Unmoved | Mildly<br>Interested | Strongly<br>Interested | Agree<br>to act |
|------------------|---------|----------------------|------------------------|-----------------|
| How people voted |         |                      |                        |                 |

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Tough job, isn't it, moving people to take an action. Now you can more fully appreciate those TV hucksters who persuade viewers to part with their hard-earned cash for kitchen products they could do without. It's a real art, getting people to act. But give yourself a pat on the back (or have a friend do it) for being nervy enough to operate way out of your own comfort zone. And congratulate yourself for being the kind of role model that will help others to venture out beyond their own areas of comfort.

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We've come to the end of our exercises, but, hopefully, it's not the end of your experimentation with the techniques of public speaking. There has been, and will continue to be, much discussion as to whether stuttering is a genetic or a psychological problem. But while that issue is being fought on other battlefields, there's a whole lot you can do to make speaking a satisfying and, yes, a *fun* activity.

All these exercises have been designed to give you the experience of being in charge and in control of your speaking experience. True, you may not be able to exercise total control of your speech blocks. But the next time

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you're up in front of people, you *can* feel the confidence that comes from taking charge and controlling many other aspects of your experience. You don't have to be fluent to feel like it's "your show."

However, you may find that the more you stop worrying about fluency and the more you pay attention to what makes speaking fun, the more fluent your speech is likely to be.

So congratulations. By working your way through these talks, you've taken an important step toward taking charge of your own stuttering.

But why stop now?

Like riding the carousel, you have the opportunity to discover these exercises are even more fun when you go around again.

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PART

8

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WHERE DO YOU GO FROM HERE?

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## PART 8

I never thought this book would be this long. The fact that it has gone on for more than 600 pages is a reflection of the complexity of chronic stuttering and blocking. The more you dig into it, the more you realize that this problem touches many sides of the individual. It touches on the way we think. The way we feel. The way we relate.

Sometimes I wonder how much simpler it would be if stuttering were simply caused by a genetic glitch, and there are many who are content to categorize it this way. But saying that stuttering is caused by genetics is like saying that a cesar salad is "caused" by mayonnaise because, upon analyzing the make-up of salad, one can detect the presence of mayonnaise. What I've tried to show throughout this book is that chronic stuttering is a system, and the more effectively you can address it as a system, the more effective and lasting your solutions will be.

The last section of the book is a listing of resources that can help you approach your stuttering from the broadest perspective possible. There is no end to the support that's available, even for those who live in the far corners of the world. Not only is the collective knowledge of the on-line stuttering community at your disposal, but most people are just an email or a Skype address away. Websites like the Stuttering Home Page are a veritable archive of useful and practical information. And the availability of supporting organizations such as Toastmasters, Speakers Clubs, personal growth programs and the like give you many options to choose from.

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## TAPPING THE RESOURCES OF THE INTERNET

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**S**tuttering is a lonely problem. If you were like me as a child, you knew perhaps one other person who stumbled and blocked on their words, but because of the shame and personal rejection associated with being a “stutterer”, the likelihood of ever discussing my condition with another person my age was virtually nil. I was too busy dealing with my own denial.

Consequently, I grew up feeling totally inhibited about my speech.

For most people who stutter, the communication picture scarcely improves as they get older. That’s because the percentage of people who suffer from chronic stuttering is so small. Most experts place the incidence of stuttering at just one percent of the population, although even this may be high if you factor out those children experiencing developmental disfluency, a condition that often disappears of its own accord as the child matures.

Consequently, it’s hard to find a fellow sufferer with whom you can share experiences and ideas.

Nor has it been easy for people who stutter to share ideas with the professional community. Most therapeutic hours are spent doing therapy, and in the typical client/therapist relationship, both parties tend to remain locked in their defined roles. Consequently, there is little encouragement for those who treat or research stuttering to collaborate as colleagues with those who stutter in the search for underlying truths.

That’s unfortunate, because the stuttering community has always been a powerful repository for creative insights on stuttering, if only it could be tapped.

Some enlightened professionals *have* bridged the chasm between the two worlds, and their efforts at partnering with the stuttering community have been amply rewarded. Nonprofessionals can be astute observers of their own speech. Their “insider’s” point of view can give them privy to insights about the nature of stuttering that are not easily accessible to the average professional who must view the problem from the outside. This is especially true of that small number of people who have recovered from stuttering on their own, without therapy. If they’ve been good observers, they have a unique perspective of the entire recovery process and what it

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entails. Unfortunately, these individuals have had no forum in which share what they have learned, and their knowledge and wisdom have been largely lost to the professional community.

At least until now.

## *A WALKING LABORATORY*

Having no place to share my experience was a source of frustration for me as I entered my early forties. For 15 years I had functioned as my own walking laboratory. If I had a theory about what might improve my speech, I didn't have to write a grant and look for funding to conduct a study. I simply had to march down to the corner grocery store and ask for a container of milk. I'd know when I came to that hard "c" whether my idea bore fruit.

I tried and experimented with many ideas and approaches. I asked for thousands of bus transfers that I didn't need. I put my latest theory to the test every time I drove into a service station and asked the attendant to "fill it up."

This self-observation was facilitated by my involvement with the ground-breaking personal growth programs that evolved during the late 60s and early 70s in California. These programs, some lasting a weekend and others meeting weekly over the course of several years, placed me in high feedback environments specifically tailored to allow me to observe how I thought, felt and functioned. Although I was dealing with personal issues of greater import than my chronic speech blocks, I could not help but notice the correlation between who I was and my ability to express myself.

By the time I had reached my mid-30s, the stuttering had dissolved and was no longer a factor in my life. I felt I'd learned something useful. But where could I share this information? Aside from the occasional class at San Francisco State College, there were no opportunities open to me.

All that changed when the National Stuttering Project was created in 1977. For the first time, I had a venue where I could share what I knew, and in turn, could begin to gain a better understanding of the degree to which my experience was common to others. Many other new members had similar interests, and the time we put in together began to pay big dividends for all of us.

The freewheeling communications forum created by the NSP was given an enormous boost when John Ahlback took over as executive director in 1981 and proceeded to publish the NSP's newsletter, *Letting GO*, on a monthly basis—an undertaking which released into the universe a veritable explosion of firsthand information on stuttering. For over 20 years the collective wisdom in this excellent publication has continued to reach out

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to an increasingly large number of people in the stuttering and professional communities with personal accounts, advice, theories, poems, words to the wise, reports and successes, messages of hope, inspiration—literally, millions of words. *Letting GO* has helped to foster a sense of community within the stuttering world while simultaneously gaining the attention of the speech-language professionals. Today, there are many clinicians and teachers who find the pages of *Letting GO* a valuable resource to further their own understanding of stuttering as well as a useful training aid for students just entering the field.

But the biggest catalyst to change is not simply words; it is *dialogue*. When people enter into dialogue, ideas shoot back and forth as one thought quickly triggers another. But dialogue is the one thing that's often lacking for people within the stuttering community. It's an advantage if you're located near a self-help chapter and can participate in meetings or can attend the occasional workshops or annual convention. But most people can't. Moreover, until now there has been little opportunity for those who stutter to dialogue directly with the professional community.

### *CREATING A WORLDWIDE FORUM*

Then along came the Internet, and suddenly, the opportunities to dialogue opened wide.

I had signed onto the Internet in the early '90's to avail myself of email, and it was not long afterward that I first learned of the existence of an Internet forum on stuttering. Originally established by Professor Woody Starkweather of Temple University as a venue for members of the professional community to exchange ideas, the STUTT-L listserv was turning out to be something more. The listserv had about 60 or so subscribers from the university and the clinical communities; however, some of the most interesting exchanges were taking place between the professionals and the sprinkling of people from the stuttering community who had found their way onto the subscriber list. I was excited. Here at last was the opportunity I'd been looking for; an opportunity to actively dialogue with many people, including those in the professional community; a chance to share my ideas and experiences and to respond to people who shared theirs.

Today, there are a number of very active listservs and chat rooms on stuttering with hundreds and hundreds of subscribers from all over the world. The volume of dialogue and data that races back and forth within and between the various stuttering communities is truly staggering. On a typical day you'll find a wealth of personal experiences, helpful ideas, comments on other personal messages, lively debates, pet theories, important announcements—you name it. You'll share ideas with people from the

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stuttering community who log on from dozens of countries all over the world, as well as with parents, speech pathologists, and researchers.

If you want to develop a fuller understanding of what stuttering is all about—or if you're challenged by the idea of developing new and innovative concepts—there is no better place to participate than on these lively forums.

**NEURO-SEMANTICS OF STUTTERING (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/neurosemanticsofstuttering>)**

One of the most exciting groups I've come across on the Internet is one that has as its objective "learning to run your own mind." My own recovery from stuttering was substantially aided by various resources I acquired that helped me to manage and control the way I thought. And I've come to recognize how important mind management is to the recovery process.

The first resource that helped me in this area was a book published in the early 60s titled *Psycho-Cybernetics* and written by Maxwell Maltz. Maltz was a plastic surgeon who noted that after surgery, some people manifested a substantial change in self-esteem while others seemed not to change at all. He correctly deduced that it was a person's internal images that truly controlled his or her mental and emotional states. Soon after, I became involved with general semantics which provided me with further mind management resources. General semantics eventually gave birth to Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), and that, in turn, gave birth to Neuro-Semantics (NS).

Bob Bodenhamer, an NLP practitioner and one of the founders of Neurosemantics has a website at [www.masteringstuttering.com](http://www.masteringstuttering.com) which focuses on a cognitive approach for achieving fluency.

Bob also moderates the neurosemanticsofstuttering Yahoo group in which people are learning to approach their stuttering from a holistic perspective and work with mind management techniques. You will learn an enormous amount, thanks to the candor of the participants and their willingness to share their personal experiences. Furthermore, your own efforts will be supported by some highly aware people who will be there to support and coach you.

The discussions about the stuttering experience are on a level of sophistication that I have seldom seen elsewhere. If you have the time, read some of the earliest emails sent to the list.

**STUTTERINGCHAT (<http://www.stutteringchat.co.uk>)**

StutteringChat is one of the largest Internet groups associated with stuttering. Its membership is drawn from every continent and comprises PWS, friends, relatives and, indeed, anyone with an interest in the subject.

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Like other forums, members can choose to receive emails individually, or via a daily collective digest.

StutteringChat is composed almost exclusively of people who stutter with only a minimum of speech professionals involved. They have live, on-line chat sessions quite often, and it really is cool to be able to connect in real time to someone else who stutters.

### **STUTT-L GOOGLE GROUP**

STUTT-L is the oldest discussion group for stuttering on the Internet. You may subscribe to and participate in discussions by logging onto this address: <http://groups.google.com/group/stutt-l/subscribe?note=1>. Your request to join will be added to a queue for the list moderators to approve. Once your subscription request is processed, you will receive an automated confirmation email message.

### **INDIVIDUAL WEBSITES, BLOGS AND YOUTUBE VIDEOS**

More and more PWS are taking matters in hand by putting up their own websites, blogs and videos. You can find literally find dozens and dozens of them by doing a Google search.

#### **STUTTERING JACK: *www.StutteringJack.com***

One of the most impressive websites is run by Stuttering Jack. The site provides information on all aspects of stuttering treatment, research, and support groups as well as breaking news and articles about stuttering related matters. It also gives you access to the Stutterer's World Friendship and Network where you can get to know PWS all over the world. If you register for the RSS feed, the site will regularly send you updates and articles of interest. Stuttering Jack's site epitomizes the power of self-help and what a single individual can do to really make a contribution. You can also find Stuttering Jack on Facebook. Just enter his name in the Find box and join in the lively discussions.

#### **YOUTUBE: *www.youtube.com***

YouTube has also become a powerful communications medium for the stuttering community. You can read all the emails you want you want, but there's nothing like actually seeing and hearing an individual sharing his or her thoughts and ideas. You'll experience about every different kind of

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stuttering there is, and you'll hear scores of people who stutter talk about their ideas and their life experiences.

You can even see a video of one of my Toastmaster presentations in which I recount how I relocated to San Francisco.

You'll find it at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kfzvO4Sj9IA>.

## *A GROWING ARCHIVE*

Suppose you needed answers on how to approach your child's stuttering, or your own. Where would you turn? Where would you turn for help in determining what to look for in a therapist? Who could you turn to for assistance with a term paper on stuttering? Where could you get a more personal point of view on stuttering than you'd find in the typical college textbook? Or let's say you're a college professor planning a class on stuttering. Where might you find representative examples of other courses on the subject? All this is just a few keystrokes away on the Stuttering Home Page at Mankato State University.

Developed by Professor Emeritus Judy Kuster, this huge and constantly growing archive was the first resource on stuttering to be instantly accessible from anywhere in the world. You'll be amazed at the range of information offered—everything from personal accounts of people's own stuttering to research papers to useful brochures for parents, lists of international stuttering support groups—you name it! The Mankato site can be accessed at [www.stutteringhomepage.com](http://www.stutteringhomepage.com).

Here are some other useful web sites:

The National Stuttering Association is the largest stuttering self-help group in the U.S.—[www.nsastutter.org](http://www.nsastutter.org).

The Stuttering Foundation of America offers a wide variety of books and brochures on stuttering—[www.stutterSFA.org](http://www.stutterSFA.org).

The Canadian Association for People who Stutter (CAPS) is the largest stuttering self-help organization in Canada—[caps.webcon.net](http://caps.webcon.net)

Speak Easy (Canada) publishes an excellent monthly newsletter—[www.speakeasycanada.com](http://www.speakeasycanada.com).

The British Stammering Association—[www.stammering.org](http://www.stammering.org).

The International Stuttering Association (ISA) is comprised of stuttering self-help organizations from around the world. The website also includes their newsletter, *One Voice*, which you can download in PDF format —[www.stutterisa.org](http://www.stutterisa.org).

Additional web sites are listed on the Stuttering Home Page or you can access them through any of the many web browsers.

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## *YOU DON'T HAVE TO GO IT ALONE*

One of the best ways to release the grip that stuttering may have on your life is to demystify it. This calls for learning as much as you can about the entire stuttering system.

You need to hear what the stuttering experience is like from other people's points of view, and discover the ways in which your experiences are similar. You also need an opportunity to share yourself—your ideas, fears, hopes and ambitions—and to see that you have the power to reach and influence others. This is all part of the process of empowerment, of discovering that you are no longer a victim but a potential agent of change.

Self-help organizations, and especially the Internet, provide the venues you need to make all this happen. In this supportive community you can learn volumes about the nature of stuttering and about yourself. It is useful information that will enhance your ability to communicate in more ways than you imagine.

But be warned. The Internet is totally addicting, so be prepared for some very, very late nights.

If you do log onto the net, I'll look forward to hearing from you, whether you're in Tennessee or Toronto or Timbuktu.

(Signed) *johnnyh567@aol.com*

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## THE VALUE OF INTERNET DISCUSSION GROUPS

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by Alan Badmington

At various times in my life, I have experimented with different approaches in an attempt to deal with my stuttering issues. On several occasions, I experienced increased freedom (and fluency) in controlled environments but I could never hold onto those gains when I returned to the outside world.

The principal reason for this inability to maintain progress was that I focused solely upon the mechanics of my speech. I did not realise that, in order to achieve permanent advances, I needed to change my disempowering mindset. Another contributory factor was the absence of support, which is so essential whether you are recovering from stuttering, drugs, alcohol, or whatever.

When, in 2000, I decided to make one final effort to address my stutter, I befriended an unexpected ally. No, I'm not referring to the stuttering management program that provided me with a springboard for change; I'm talking about something that has revolutionised the manner in which we communicate, both individually and collectively – THE INTERNET.

### *THE INTERNET OPENED UP A WHOLE NEW WORLD*

At the time, I had not read any books or meaningful material about the subject that had adversely affected my life since early childhood. I was virtually ignorant of the various therapies that were available and knew nothing about how other people were coping with similar issues in their lives.

Everything changed overnight when I secured online access. I was astounded by the wide array of information being disseminated and became aware of the existence of several international discussion groups dedicated to the subject of stuttering.

Within days, I joined several of these groups, affording me access to written exchanges between members located in many parts of the world. The way in which these forums operate is that once an email (or post) has been submitted by a member, it is made available to everyone within the group (either by individual circulation or via a central notice board).

Should someone decide to respond to a post, then that person's comments are automatically communicated to the entire membership. This may, in turn, stimulate others to participate, thereby continuing the discussion, or causing the subject to develop in a different direction.

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When I first joined the forums, I was surprised and intrigued by the nature of the exchanges that were taking place. My reaction will be better understood when I explain that, throughout my life, I had met very few people who stuttered. I was also blissfully unaware of the existence of self-help groups or other supportive organisations.

After living in virtual isolation (from other PWS) for more than 50 years, I now found myself reading intimate and moving details about the experiences of total strangers scattered around the globe. It was bizarre, yet somehow reassuring, to learn that there were so many others who had experienced (or were still experiencing) similar struggles, heartaches and disappointments.

At first, I just absorbed what I was reading without making any effort to respond. Everyone seemed to know everyone else – each forum appeared to be an established social circle. I wondered how they would react to intervention by a newcomer and questioned whether or not I had anything of value to contribute. Why should someone on the other side of the world be interested in things occurring in my life?

### *I JOINED IN THE DISCUSSION*

It didn't take me long to change my thinking. When someone recounted a particular incident; raised a specific issue; or asked for advice; I felt an urge to respond. After all, they were talking about matters to which I could relate. The circumstances may not have been identical but there were many similarities to the personal experiences that I had encountered. I, therefore, felt qualified to offer my views.

In due course I submitted my first post; quickly followed by the second...and the third. Within a relatively short period of time, I had become a regular subscriber to several different forums, spending several hours each day at the keyboard. The subjects under discussion were varied and plentiful, creating daily exercise for my old grey matter.

Before long, I wasn't content to merely respond to topics generated by other members. There were new subjects that I wished to initiate myself. I should explain that my introduction to the Internet (and discussion groups) coincided with the commencement of another very significant chapter in my life. I refer to my decision to seek the assistance of a stuttering management program that encourages a holistic approach, including assertive self-acceptance, non-avoidance and expansion of one's comfort zones. As a result, there were so many exciting things happening to me.

Having been provided with new tools and techniques (that enabled me to combat blocking and deal with troublesome words/sounds), I devised an extensive and pro-active plan of action designed to challenge my self-limiting beliefs and widen my restrictive self-image (as outlined in the following paper that I contributed to the 2003 International Stuttering Awareness Day online conference "STEP OUTSIDE: Why expanding comfort zones can improve our stuttering and lead to more fulfilling lives."

<http://www.mnsu.edu/comdis/isad6/papers/badmington6.html>

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## *YOU HAVE TO STICK YOUR NECK OUT*

We don't change behaviours by retaining the status quo – I knew that I needed to confront my fears and tread unfamiliar paths. Like the turtle, we can only move forward when we stick our neck out.

My daily efforts to live a more expansive lifestyle were incredibly stimulating - I approached each day with optimism, vigour and zest. I grew progressively in confidence and stature as I fulfilled a wide range of challenges and roles. But, although I felt considerable personal inner satisfaction, I also recognised the value of sharing those experiences with others.

So, whenever I accomplished a specific breakthrough, or completed a new venture (such as winning a public speaking contest; attending an acting school; addressing a community group; hosting a charity concert; facilitating a workshop; or undertaking a live radio interview), I didn't keep it to myself. I used the appropriate group as a vehicle to tell everyone else. I also drew attention to many mundane occurrences that I felt were relevant and of interest.

Relating those incidents had a very powerful impact upon me. Each time I relived a successful incident, it reaffirmed what I had achieved. I genuinely believe that my progress during recent years has been helped considerably by the fact that I have been able to tell myself (and others) about the positive experiences I have enjoyed. Some people may be of the opinion (and it's their prerogative to think whatever they choose) that speaking about one's successes is egotistical. Well, I happen to hold an opposing view. That was certainly not my motivation for sharing. It's simply that re-living the successful episodes strengthened my memories of those events. (I didn't feel too guilty because I knew that the delete button was always readily available to those who did not wish to read my posts).

## *ACCENTUATING THE POSITIVE*

Since early childhood, my stuttering was fuelled and perpetuated by the difficulties, setbacks, pain and catalogue of lost opportunities that I encountered. For over half a century, I constantly reminded myself of what I could NOT do, or the dire consequences of attempting to speak in certain situations. I spent a lifetime accumulating, recounting and giving far too much prominence to the memories of negative speaking experiences. As a result, my stutter flourished and thrived.

The more I nourished and sustained it, the more it impacted upon my daily existence. I make no excuse for having reversed that trait. The worm has turned and, in direct contrast, I now constantly remind myself of my successes. You should never shirk from telling yourself how much you have achieved.

I recently read an interesting article that appears to justify the practice I have adopted for the past 11 years. Research indicates that when we savour and foster positive experiences, it intensifies our positive responses to them. The longer something is held in our awareness, the more emotionally stimulating it becomes.

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When we focus on positive happenings, it increases our positive emotions, which correspondingly generate health benefits in relation to our immune system and stress. Other long-term advantages of positive emotions are that they lift your mood and increase optimism, resilience and resourcefulness. They also counteract the effects of painful experiences, including trauma. So, you see, it appears that I was right all along.

Another spin-off (of speaking about our successes) is that it can encourage others to emulate the challenges that we have fulfilled. I frequently receive feedback from people (both within and outside the stuttering community) who generously confide that my revelations have influenced them to confront obstacles in their own lives.

From a personal point of view, learning about a PWS who successfully embraced public speaking had a huge impact upon my self-concept. Until I heard him speak (in early 2000), I truly believed that such a role lay outside the scope of someone who stuttered. I was inspired by his activities and wanted to tread a similar path. That fortuitous occurrence sowed the seeds of an empowering belief that was to subsequently change the course of my life. After more than half a century of self-doubt and holding back, I finally allowed myself to entertain the thought that I could do something meaningful about my communication issues. The rest is history, as they say.

I cannot overemphasize the immense benefits that I have derived from participating in online discussion groups. Perusing posts submitted by my fellow members rekindled memories of earlier events that I had long forgotten. Each time I composed a response, I continued to travel that mental journey through time, jogging additional recollections from the past. When we start thinking about one thing it can trigger a chain reaction – creating links to similar occurrences. That's how memories are stored in the brain. I never cease to be amazed by what the sub-conscious can unveil when it is stimulated or interrogated.

Fear and self-doubt figure prominently in the lives of many people, not just those who stutter. They can sabotage hopes and aspirations. When left to our own devices, it is possible that we may never summon up sufficient courage to confront the issues that are impeding our progress. However, as a member of an online forum, some people gain confidence and encouragement by leaning upon the knowledge, camaraderie and collective support that are present within that group.

I have witnessed this on many occasions, particularly in two of the forums to which I subscribe. Those who invite guidance and suggestions from others in advance of an upcoming event (maybe a job interview or public speaking engagement) report positive outcomes. But, of course, prior consultation does not always guarantee success.

Following a highly successful work presentation, one member of the Yahoo neurosemanticsofstuttering group wrote: *Thanks for your very kind messages. Not being alone is very important. Of course, when we are in speaking situations, it's up to us and we are the only one who can do something. But I believe in the effects of "coaching" and positive speech. You know, for this oral presentation, I feel I was prepared like an Olympic athlete! Best coaches (and champions) in the world had provided me the best advice. I have been very lucky.*

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Online discussion groups represent different things to different people. You've probably heard it said that we are all unique. Well, that really is the case. We originate from different backgrounds; are subjected to different life experiences; and accumulate different degrees of emotional baggage. We commence from different starting lines; operate in accordance with different beliefs, self-concepts and values; and possess different aspirations.

The desired aim of one person is likely to differ appreciably from the expectations of another member. While some hope to deal effectively with their stuttering issues, others may not believe that this is possible. Those who wish to adopt a more expansive lifestyle will, undoubtedly, welcome tips on how to achieve that goal, whereas less ambitious members might be content to follow a less-risky passage.

### *GROUPS HAVE THEIR OWN ORIENTATIONS*

I have found that online groups vary considerably in their objective, format and content of discussion, as well as the composition, age, attitude and behaviour of members. Some forums tend to fulfil the role of a support group, while others have a more specific agenda.

For example, the Yahoo *neurosemanticsofstuttering* group was set up for the "primary purpose of helping and working with PWS to overcome stuttering, utilizing Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), Neuro-Semantic tools and other cognitive methods to help achieve that outcome."

Another forum caters wholly for those with covert issues, while a separate group exists to assist parents of children and teens who stutter. Some stuttering management programs also offer online support for clients, incorporating the written and spoken word.

The National Stuttering Association provides a network of online meeting places to facilitate interaction between members of its local chapters (self-help groups), as well as an additional group that allows delegates to keep in touch between annual conferences.

The websites of several forums also contain a wealth of useful reading material, together with links to podcasts, videos and other online resources. I think it is relevant to highlight the fact that, whereas the majority of online discussion groups restrict access to its members, some allow the written exchanges to be viewed by the public. I add this cautionary note because there may be occasions when a subscriber might unwittingly furnish personal details that he/she would not wish to be read by all and sundry.

Another point to be considered is that the exchanges may, occasionally, become a little heated as members write about matters of an emotional nature. Freed from their customary struggles with the spoken word, some PWS adopt a more assertive (or even aggressive) role and communicate, with passion, exactly what they want to say. Words are plucked from the extremities of their vocabulary without the usual anticipatory fear associated with stuttering.

For so many years, transferring my thoughts to paper was the only effective way in which I could meaningfully express myself. My past oral exchanges were littered with words that I considered to be inferior or, in

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some cases, totally inappropriate. I succumbed to mediocrity simply because I did not want the listener to see/hear me stutter.

Whilst it is heartening to see members letting go and giving vent to their feelings, it is important that the rules of netiquette should always be observed. We can be both assertive and respectful at the same time. Thankfully, personal attacks are infrequent and can be quickly nipped in the bud by the sensible intervention of the moderator(s).

There are forums to suit everyone – it's simply a case of trial and error to determine which satisfy your individual needs. If you find that a particular group is not providing what you require, then simply transfer your attention elsewhere. That's exactly what I've done. At one time, I held simultaneous membership of no fewer than 11 groups. (No wonder my wife used to complain that I was spending too much time online.)

Today I am far more selective and restrict my contributions to only two groups. As stuttering has ceased to be an issue in my life, I have greatly reduced the number of posts that I now submit. Although I no longer find it necessary to publicly reinforce the memories of my positive experiences, I still occasionally share details of such occurrences. My principal purposes are to illustrate how such challenges can be created; reiterate the value of exploring uncharted waters; or to demonstrate a particular point. Nowadays, my limited participation is generally confined to subjects that ignite my interest, or in responding to specific questions that are posed by others. Due to fluctuations within a group, it is not unusual for certain topics to be resurrected from time to time, as new members join.

### *LEARNING FROM OTHERS*

I have gained varying degrees of benefit from virtually every forum to which I have subscribed. We can all learn something (however small) from each other's stories. Diversity encourages different perspectives. The Internet has become such a valuable asset in enabling those who stutter to communicate with each other. Over the years, I have developed some close friendships that now extend outside the parameters of those groups.

Reading about the lives of other PWS can provide an interesting insight into how they deal (or have dealt) with their respective difficulties, as well as offering reciprocal inspiration. It can also alert us to possibilities of which we were previously unaware – in relation to therapies, techniques and opportunities that allow us to unearth our true potential when we are prepared to expose ourselves to uncertainty and change. In effect, it can open our eyes to possibilities that we could never have imagined.

As a result of these online interactions, and the revealing evaluations that we have retrospectively conducted in relation to past (and more recent) events, many of us now possess a far greater understanding of the issues that shape our lives. We are also better informed about how we (and others) react to the diverse challenges that confront us, and have discovered that there are exciting and fulfilling paths available for us to tread. But, perhaps, most importantly, we know that we need never again experience the isolation of walking those unfamiliar paths alone.

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## *BECOMING DESENSITIZED*

Many PWS find it difficult to talk about the issues that affect their lives, even with friends and family members. Yet, many who subscribe to online support groups confide that they are far more at ease when discussing such matters within that environment. Divulging even the most intimate details to “total strangers” can sometimes be less challenging than revealing them to someone you know.

Greater openness about my lifetime struggles has proved invaluable in helping me to overcome my previous embarrassment. Revealing my “darkest secrets” (both online and in everyday situations) has greatly aided the desensitization process.

In conclusion, I have no hesitation in declaring that, without participation in Internet discussion groups, I would not now be at such a favourable position in my life. I view my involvement as yet another important piece in this complex jigsaw that we know as stuttering.

## **Some popular stuttering forums**

**Covert-S** – <http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/Covert-S/>

**Parents-W** – <http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/Parents-W/>

**Neurosemanticsofstuttering** –

<http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/neurosemanticsofstuttering/>

**NSA Conference** – <http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/nsa-conference/>

**NSA-Parents** – <http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/NSA-Parents/>

**NSA-Teens** – <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/NSA-Teens/>

**Parents-W** – <http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/Parents-W/>

**Sutteringchat** – <http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/stutteringchat/>

**Stuttering Forum** – <http://stutteringforum.com/>

**Stuttering Support** –

<http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/StutteringSupport/>

**Stutt-L** – <http://groups.google.com/group/stutt-l>

**Stutt-X** – <https://lists.asu.edu/cgi-bin/wa?A0=stutt-x>



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## RESOURCES FOR CHANGE

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**I**t would be ideal if everyone could enroll in a speech therapy program and after working hard, enjoy a full recovery.

But such is not the case.

People are different. Some have terrible childhood memories they have to work through. Others don't. Some grow up with simple stuttering patterns. Others have constructed complex struggle behaviors they must unlearn.

The stuttering system is different for each person, which is why a one-size-fits-all approach is unlikely to have success unless your story just happens to fit a standard template. Solutions have to be tailored to the individual.

Chronic stuttering is a multidimensional program and usually needs to be addressed from many different directions.

What kinds of resources are available?

### *SPEECH THERAPY*

Let's start with the traditional resource: speech therapy. I never worked with a speech therapist, so I can't speak from experience. But I have been around the stuttering self-help community for over 33 years, and I've heard many PWS talk about their experiences with a therapist. I have also met and talked with many speech-language pathologists (SLPs).

Here are some things I've learned.

**Experience.** If you plan to work with an SLP, check first and find out whether he or she has worked with people in the stuttering community. Chronic stuttering is a much different problem from, say, a lisp or an articulation problem. More facets of the individual have to be addressed.

SLPs may receive their degrees without ever having worked with a person who stutters. Everything they know about stuttering may come out of textbooks or classes lectures. But there is no substitute for personal experience. Without real-life experience and an opportunity to try things out, it's all too easy to develop a perspective that is not broad or inclusive enough to effectively address the problem.

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Life experience is important. Therapists who are most effective are those who have lived through their own personal growth issues. One very effective SLP I know went through the free speech movement in California in the 1960s. The movement was characterized by intense interaction and personal exploration, and during this time she learned volumes about what inhibits or motivates behavior. Another nationally-known SLP was a drama major in college and routinely explored the motivation and life issues of the characters he played.

This is not to say that such experience is absolutely essential, but I do know that experiential knowledge is every bit as important as abstract knowledge. In the best possible world, your therapist will have a healthy dose of both.

**Can speech therapy limit your progress?** Ironically, it can. In the chapter entitled “Zen in the Art of Fluency” we looked at the Zen approach to mastery and how it calls for giving up conscious control and letting your subconscious take over. It’s a point worth revisiting. There are therapists whose *only* focus is on fluency, and who encourage you to make that your permanent goal. What is ironic is that the very focus that allows you to attain mechanical fluency can militate against your reaching the next step of spontaneous self-expression.

Note that I’m purposely avoiding the term “spontaneous fluency.” That’s because total fluency may not be your natural way of speaking. Ordinary people umm, ahh, repeat and start over, and bobulate and they don’t think twice about it. What the PWS is looking for is freedom from blocking.

Vocal variety – varying pitch, rate, tone, volume and pausing – communicates the 85 percent of your message that is non-verbal. I cannot tell you how many PWS I have met through the years who have confided that they gave up their fluency technique because in using it they felt too mechanical. Sure they could speak but it didn’t feel like they were themselves. Something was missing.

That’s not surprising. Pitch, rate, tone, volume and pausing are what give you your sense of identity. It’s what allows you to express your internal self. Imagine singing your favorite song using only one or two notes. It wouldn’t be much of a song. It would be a chant.

If you want to reach a high level of comfort when you speak, you need to address the entire stuttering system. *You have to become comfortable with letting go and being yourself when you talk.* Speech therapists who address the whole stuttering system and who encourage you to be fully expressive are the ones most likely to help you attain lasting success.

But what do you do if your local resources are limited? Some SLPs are now doing speech therapy over the Internet using Skype and video. One

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speech-language pathologist who does on-line coaching (and whose viewpoint is very holistic) is Marjorie Foer. Her email address is [marjorierf@cox.net](mailto:marjorierf@cox.net), and her phone number in Charlestown, Rhode Island is 401-364-8788. See her paper at <http://www.mnsu.edu/comdis/isad5/papers/foer.html>.

## *COACHING*

Personal coaching is a newcomer to the stuttering scene. Thanks to the Internet, a growing number of people like myself with expertise in particular aspects of stuttering can now share their information and experience on a one-to-one basis with anyone in the world. We can help you explore your stuttering system and give you guidance on what steps and strategies will be most productive.

As in sports, a coach shows you how to focus your energies where they will do the most good. A coach also helps you to identify and define your unique issues. Proper coaching improves your chances of reaching your goals faster and more efficiently.

Today, certain kinds of coaching can be conducted by phone or internet. And if you and your coach have an Internet camera and Skype, you can even talk face to face, making the session more personal.

Coaches work in several areas.

## *HEXAGON COACHING*

I can help you identify, decipher, understand and work with your total stuttering system.

Remember, if you cannot properly define the problem, your chances of solving it are dim. But if you understand the parts and how they work together, it becomes more likely that you can put together an effective strategy for recovery.

My job as a coach is to help you to identify the elements in your daily life that contribute to your stuttering hexagon. Typically, many triggers will be things you're not even aware of.

As we work together, we'll explore situations in which speech is easier, as well as situations where speech is challenging, and you'll begin to see the common threads that are woven throughout your speaking world. You'll start to see patterns. You'll identify triggers. You'll discover what these situations have things in common. And you'll understand the way these components come together to form a system.

We also explore such resources as Toastmasters, Speakers Clubs, and Internet discussion groups where you can enlist the support of other people.

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We might even experiment during the session, trying out various strategies in the moment to see how they impact your speech.

If you'd like to find out more about exploring your unique stuttering hexagon, contact me at [stutterhexagon@aol.com](mailto:stutterhexagon@aol.com). You can also send a text message to my Skype account at [jcharr1234](https://www.skype.com/people/jcharr1234). Or call me at 415-647-4700.

## COGNITIVE COACHING

Since blocking is a survival strategy, it's really important to understand how and why you perceive the world the way you do. Equally important is developing a cache of tools and techniques that allow you to exercise control over your cognitive processes, instead of being totally at their effect.

Cognitive coaching focuses on how you perceive and process your experience. I developed cognitive tools in the 1960s through my study of general semantics and psycho-cybernetics although they were fairly elementary by today's standards. Today an NLP coaching session can run you through various processes that will help you get in touch with the thoughts and feelings that trigger your blocking behavior. The coach can also teach you tools that you can work with on your own.

There are a growing number of practitioners in the field who have insight into the stuttering syndrome and who can work by phone or Skype. Here are several I know personally

**Bob Bodenhamer, D.Min.** is a leading expert in a branch of cognitive retraining called Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP). He has authored or co-authored a number of books in the field and, at the turn over the century, began working more intensely with members of the stuttering community. In conjunction with Michael Hall, Ph.D., Bob created a branch of NLP called neurosemantics (NS). Check [www.masteringstuttering.com](http://www.masteringstuttering.com) for a variety of resources on stuttering, including NLP processes that you can do by yourself. Bob also runs trainings for individuals and practitioners around the world. Bob has never stuttered, but he has as keen an understanding of the dynamics that drive the problem as anyone I've met. Bob is also the owner of the *neurosemanticsofstuttering* discussion forum. He can be reached by phone at 704-864-3585, and his email is [bobbybodenhamer@yahoo.com](mailto:bobbybodenhamer@yahoo.com). On page 600 you can find a description of Bob's book – *I Have a Voice: How to Stop Stuttering*.

**René Robben** is a good example of a new wave of NLP practitioners who do not have university training in the field of psychology but who nonetheless offer powerful qualifications and resources. René grew up with a stuttering problem and knows the issues from the inside out. He also has substantially recovered. In 2009 he completed training in NLP and earned his credentials as an NLP Master Practitioner. Rene has been

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a long time member of the neurosemantics list, and I am continually impressed with his insights and sound advice. I also had the pleasure of meeting him in Copenhagen several years ago when I ran a workshop there. Rene speaks Dutch, English and German and lives in The Netherlands. His email address is [coaching@rene-robbe.nl](mailto:coaching@rene-robbe.nl). Phone is +31-6-209-36-61. And his website is [www.rene-robbe.nl](http://www.rene-robbe.nl).

**Tim Mackesey, BRSFD, CCC-SLP.** You may already be familiar with Tim from his biographical article on page 343 and the piece by his client on page 432. Tim is a Board Recognized Specialist in Fluency Disorders. In addition to his qualifications as a speech-language pathologist, Tim is a Master Practitioner of Neuro-Linguistic Programming and Neuro-Semantics. He taught the graduate-level Fluency Disorders course at Georgia State University. Tim is committed to the pursuit of effective treatment for stuttering. He has appeared on many television and radio programs in the Atlanta area educating listeners on the early detection and treatment of fluency disorders. When not working one-on-one with his clients, Tim may be found delivering workshops nationally and internationally. Tim also specializes in treating young children, and he's had remarkable successes. Tim can be reached at [tim.mackesey@stuttering-specialist.com](mailto:tim.mackesey@stuttering-specialist.com) and by phone at 770-399-5455. His website is [www.stuttering-specialist.com](http://www.stuttering-specialist.com).

Other NLP practitioners familiar with stuttering-related issues can be found at [www.masteringstuttering.com/Providers.htm](http://www.masteringstuttering.com/Providers.htm)

## *HOME STUDY PROGRAMS*

**Chazzler DiCyprian** is a native of Cyprus who spent eight years studying and working in America. I met him while he was attending a stuttering-related program, and we kept in contact by phone. I was really impressed by how well he understood the concept of the Stuttering Hexagon. Stuttering was not only a speech block for Chazzler, it was a block in his choices, his decisions, his beliefs, his dreams, in who he was and what he could achieve in life. Yet, all his efforts at finding a solution for his speech had been unsuccessful until he met "some amazing people" in California who had been able to recover and who were more than happy to help him to do the same. Chazzler decided to start an online program called Stuttering Dissolution with the goal of training and equipping PWS to live a confident, successful and fulfilled life. The package includes videos, audios, e-books and interviews on how to overcome stuttering. The objective of the multi-media program is to "help you unlock the hidden mystery of stuttering and to provide you with proven strategies to put an end to the emotional pain of stuttering - knowingly, honestly, confidently, effectively, and permanently." You can find out more at [www.StutteringDissolution.com](http://www.StutteringDissolution.com).

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## *INTENSIVE PROGRAMS*

The following is a partial list of stuttering-related programs and personal growth programs that adopt a holistic approach.

### **Boston University**

Adriana Digrande, M.A., CCC-SLP  
Dept. of Communication Disorders  
635 Commonwealth Avenue  
Boston, MA 02115  
(617) 353-4778  
digrande@bu.edu

This intensive four-week program combines cognitive restructuring and motor retraining exercises with stress reduction activities. Participants work on understanding the relationship between their attitudes and beliefs about themselves and stuttering as they learn how to better manage their speech in their everyday lives. The program includes two months of structured follow-up as well as long-term ongoing support. Call or write for dates.

### **The American Institute for Stuttering**

27 West 20th St, Ste 1203  
New York, NY 10011  
Toll free: (877) 378-888  
Phone: (212) 633-6400  
Fax: (212) 220-3922  
ais@stutteringtreatment.org  
www.stutteringtreatment.org

The American Institute's three week intensive program is whole person in nature and incorporates physical speech retraining for management of the speech and vocal muscles, direct work to reduce fears and avoidances, and a strengthening of confidence and self perception. Eight intensive programs are conducted annually and are appropriate from age 11/12 through adult. At least one summer intensive is designed for children ages 8 -11. The intensive includes two months of structured follow up, including a weekly support group for local clients. Additionally, there are many options for long term support. AIS also provides services for pre-school and school aged children and their families. Call, write or email for more information.

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**Successful Stuttering Management Program (SSMP)**

Kim Krieger, M.S., CCC-SLP  
Workshop Director  
Eastern Washington University  
Dept. of Communication Disorders  
Cheney, WA 99004  
Phone: (509) 359-2302

The Successful Stuttering Management Program (SSMP) provides a practical, hands-on approach to stuttering therapy. It is a program of doing, not one of philosophizing about, theorizing about, nor debating about, stuttering. The therapy program is intensive in nature and designed for adult and adolescent stutterers from the age of 15 through adulthood. All of the stutterers stay in a university dormitory which provides the opportunity to relate closely with one another. The therapy consists of both group and individual work to meet the specific needs of each person. The dates of the program are typically in the month of July for three and one-half weeks. Sessions run six days a week for four hours a day. They also have post sessions follow-ups. Some scholarships may be available, along with funding from the public schools and healthcare plans. Call or write for exact dates.

**Pennsylvania State University**

Gordon Blood, Ph.D., CCC-SLP  
Dept. of Communication Disorders  
110 Moore Building  
University Park, PA 16802  
(814) 865-3177  
(814) 865-5414

This three-week residential program for young adults is usually held in May. Some scholarship monies are available. This program follows along the same lines as the Eastern Washington University program. Call or write for exact dates.

**University of Utah**

Tom Gurrister, M.S., CCC-SLP  
Wasatch Speech and Hearing Center  
2469 E 7000 S Union Blvd, Ste 110  
Salt Lake City, UT 84121-3343  
Phone: (801) 942-4211  
tgurrister@stutteringinfo.com  
www.stutteringinfo.com

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This is a three-week program for ages fifteen through adult. Sessions run six days a week for four hours a day. The dates are usually late July-early August. Call or write for exact dates and information about fees. Some scholarships may be available. This program is the same as the Washington State SSMP.

**The McGuire Programme**

[www.mcguireprogramme.com](http://www.mcguireprogramme.com)

[davemcguire@msm.com](mailto:davemcguire@msm.com).

Check the website for contact information in specific countries

I'm particularly comfortable with this program because the Stuttering Hexagon concept, as well as the 10 exercises at the front of this book, have been adopted as integral parts of the standard training. Four-day intensive courses are held in the U.K., Ireland, Sweden, Norway, Australia, New Zealand, the U.S. and other countries. Graduates are entitled to reaudit any number of times for a token charge. The course also provides the most extensive (free) follow-up support system of any stuttering-related program. Graduates may qualify to become instructors and coaches. Call for dates or check the website.

**City Literary Institute**

**Speech and Language Therapy Department**

**16 Stukeley Street, off Drury Lane**

**London WC2B5LJ, U.K.**

**Phone: 020 7242 0224 (direct line)**

**[speechtherapy@citylit.ac.uk](mailto:speechtherapy@citylit.ac.uk).**

**[www.citylit.ac.uk](http://www.citylit.ac.uk)**

The City Lit is an adult education institute which has offered a stammering therapy service in central London for over 40 years. City Lit promotes the belief that in order to achieve greater ease of speech, people need to work on both the physical and emotional aspects of stammering. All courses are run by a team of specialist speech and language therapists and are offered in a variety of formats. Clients can elect to work on their stammering in a program of *intensive therapy*. City Lit also offers an extensive range of *short workshops* which includes telephone skills, stress management, interviews, speaking circles and presentations. The variety of evening classes is ongoing throughout the year, and many people find that evening therapy fits in well with their work commitments. The aims of the courses include developing self-confidence, reducing negative feelings about stammering, learning strategies to speak more easily, and gaining support and encouragement from working in a group.

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## **INFORMATION ON STUTTERING**

### **The Stuttering Foundation of America**

3100 Walnut Grove Road, Suite 603  
P.O. Box 11749  
Memphis, TN 38111-0749  
[www.stutteringhelp.org](http://www.stutteringhelp.org)

The SFA provides additional information on intensive programs ([www.stuttersfa.aa.psiweb.com/reflists/ref\\_icl.htm](http://www.stuttersfa.aa.psiweb.com/reflists/ref_icl.htm)), and also publishes an extensive list of books and brochures on stuttering.

### **National Stuttering Association**

119 W. 40th Street, 14th Floor  
New York, NY 10018  
Toll free: (800) 364-1677. Phone: 212-944-4050. Fax: 212-944-8244  
[NSAstutter@aol.com](mailto:NSAstutter@aol.com)  
[www.WeStutter.org](http://www.WeStutter.org)

The largest self-help organization in the U.S. for people who stutter provides information and books on stuttering, a nationwide network of self-help chapters, and various programs and workshops for adults and children.

### **Neuro-Linguistic Programming Information Center**

[www.nlpinfo.com](http://www.nlpinfo.com)

Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) studies the structure of how humans think and experience the world. From these models, techniques have been developed for quickly and effectively changing thoughts, behaviors and limiting beliefs.

### **International Society of Neuro-Semantics®**

[www.neurosemantics.com](http://www.neurosemantics.com)

Neuro-Semantics refers to the way we create meanings in our minds, and how these meanings become transformed into beliefs, perceptions, emotions, and ultimately, the very frames of reference that shape our life. By helping us to become conscious of and alter these mental frames, Neuro-Semantics gives us a way to shape our own reality. In so doing, it offers some of the most practical, powerful tools I've seen for addressing the underlying forces that drive the speech block. In addition to the website, there is also a Yahoo group where you can find provocative and compelling discussions

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on the application of Neuro-Semantics to stuttering. Many subscribers are willing to share their personal journeys in detail, and what they offer is both uplifting and enlightening. You can register at <<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/neurosemanticsofstuttering/>>. I recommend you do.

#### **International Stuttering Association**

[www.stutterisa.org](http://www.stutterisa.org)

Founded in 1995, the International Stuttering Association (ISA) is a world-wide network of people who stutter, a non-profit umbrella association dedicated to close cooperation among independent national and international self-help organizations of people who stutter. As of May, 2002, organizations from the following countries are represented: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cameroon, Canada, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, India, Iran, Ireland, Israel, Japan, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, Luxemburg, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, and the U.S.A. Website addresses for the individual organizations can be found on the ISA site.

### *PERSONAL GROWTH PROGRAMS*

This is just a minuscule sampling of the huge number of programs that deal with self-discovery, self-assertiveness, and personal transformation:

#### **The Landmark Forum**

Corporate Offices:

Landmark Education Corporation

353 Sacramento Street Suite 200

San Francisco, CA 94111

Phone: (415) 981-8850. Fax (415) 616-2411

[www.landmarkeducation.com](http://www.landmarkeducation.com).

Landmark's programs challenge conventional perspectives and decision-making patterns and provide new tools – even new use of language – for effecting significant change and shifting the very nature of what is possible. Their intensive programs combine lecture and experiential learning. The basic training extends over several successive days, plus they offer a broad list of follow-up seminars that helps you to apply the material in various areas of your life. Landmark has 43 offices worldwide and conducts trainings in many of the world's major cities.

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**The Option Institute**

2080 S. Undermountain Road  
Sheffield, MA 01257  
Toll free: 800-714-2779  
Phone: (413) 229-2100. Fax: (413) 229-8931  
info@optioninstitute.com  
www.option.org

For nearly two decades, the Option Institute has been teaching people to maximize their happiness and success in all areas of their career, health, relationships and quality of life. Their programs also help individuals overcome specific challenges like depression, anxiety, and stress.

**Toastmasters International**

PO Box 9052  
Mission Viejo, CA 92690  
Telephone: (949) 858-8255  
www.toastmasters.org

One of the greatest resources available to the person who stutters is Toastmasters International. This organization is designed, not specifically for the PWS, but for anyone who wants to learn to speak effectively in front of others. The worldwide organization is made up of thousands upon thousands of individual clubs. Virtually any city of more than a few thousand people is likely to have a Toastmasters club. In San Francisco, alone, there are over 40.

Toastmasters is a place where you can simultaneously experience both risk and safety — an unbeatable formula for moving your life forward. It's a place where you can be yourself. Most people, fluent or not, have high anxiety around standing up and speaking, so even though you may be dealing with chronic stuttering, the other club members never fail to be understanding and supportive. In fact, people who stutter often choose to give a presentation about stuttering as one of their initial 5 - 7 minute speeches, and when they do, they are usually stunned by the enthusiastic reception.

Your involvement in Toastmasters simultaneously strengthens many points around the Stuttering Hexagon. Your *beliefs* will change as you discover that your effectiveness is not tied up in how fluent you are but how effectively you communicate. (Many NSA members become president of their Toastmaster clubs, and many others do extremely well in the semi-annual competitions.) Your *perceptions* will change as you begin to see that your fellow club members are supportive and that perfection is not required

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to have fun. Your *physiological responses* are less likely to slip into a fight or flight reaction because you've become used to being in front of people. And your *emotions* gradually segue from fear and anxiety into confidence and connectedness.

Toastmasters also provides opportunities to take on many different roles. At each meeting, there are various positions to fill. You might be the person who starts the meeting with a joke...or the one who comes in with the word of the day. It may be your turn to give a 5 to 7 minute talk (most talks fall within this range). Or you could be an evaluator, the timer, or the "ah" counter. You can also build your leadership skills by becoming an officer of the club and taking on such roles as Membership VP, Education VP, or even President. If you have lived much of your life feeling disempowered, Toastmasters offers you constant opportunities to modify your self-image, build your self-esteem, and become the kind of person you've always wanted to be.

Most important, Toastmasters is a place where you experiment without worrying about the consequences. It is the ultimate learning environment where imperfection is not only tolerated but encouraged, where doing something that almost works out simply means that you're not playing it safe, but reaching out and trying new things.

You can find out more about Toastmasters by checking their website ([www.toastmasters.org](http://www.toastmasters.org)) or your local Chamber of Commerce to find out the location of clubs in your area. Then simply drop by and observe one or several clubs in action.

And if you'd like to watch one of my Toastmaster speeches, you can find it at Toastmasters at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=kfzvO4Sj9IA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kfzvO4Sj9IA).

## *EXPLOIT THE OPPORTUNITIES*

Finally, there are programs run by local schools, churches, private practitioners, and private organizations that deal with a wealth of personal growth subjects such as self-assertion, self-esteem building, and self-discovery.

As you can see, when it comes to changing your Stuttering Hexagon, there are any number of ways to take action. Despite how it may feel during those low moments, you are not helpless. Even a little inventiveness, determination, and persistence will take you a long way.

As you venture outward, I'll be interested in hearing what specific programs and strategies are having a positive impact on your stuttering system, especially anything you're doing that's innovative.

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Note: the resources mentioned in this chapter and in other parts of the book are current as of September 2011 and are subject to change.

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## BOOKS YOU'LL FIND HELPFUL

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I have never heard of anyone who ever made their stuttering disappear simply by reading a book. Nonetheless, books can have a big influence on what you perceive and believe, and changes in those areas can definitely influence the entire stuttering system.

But which books are most important?

Hard to say.

Since we're all different from each other, you really can't make any sweeping predictions about how certain books will affect certain people. This is why, when people put together bibliographies, they include every book they can think of that might be relevant.

I don't know about you, but personally, I'm intimidated when somebody gives me a long reading list. Usually, there are so many titles that I don't know where to start, and just tackling the list seems overly forbidding. So in the spirit of relevancy, I'd like to keep my recommendations to just a handful of titles. Of course, there are tons of books that will be useful to you. However, I think that the following have a good chance of having a positive influence on your speech since they all cut to something essential within the stuttering system.

***The New Psycho-Cybernetics* by Maxwell Maltz, MD. and Dan S. Kennedy.  
Psycho-Cybernetics Foundation**

This is the first of four books on the cognitive aspects of chronic stuttering that I consider a must read. ("Cognitive" corresponds to the "perceptions" and "beliefs" points of the Stuttering Hexagon.) *Psycho-Cybernetics* was the very first book that I found helpful in dealing with my speech, because it gave me an understanding of how the images in my mind controlled my feelings and behaviors—and ultimately, my ability to speak fluently. Written by Maxwell Maltz, a plastic surgeon, the book speaks compellingly of the power of the internal self-image and how to make it more positive. The original version of this book came out in the early 1960s and has currently sold over *10 million copies*. The latest version has been updated by Dan S. Kennedy who, himself, was once a person who stuttered.

***People in Quandaries* by Wendell Johnson. International Society for General Semantics.**

This is a classic book by one of the giants in the field of stuttering. General Semantics describes the way the *structure* of language affects perception. I have found general semantics important because how I use language will

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impact my level of stress, and this, in turn, will have a direct effect on my speech. Johnson gives the most lucid presentation on this subject of anyone I've read.

***I Have a Voice: How to Stop Stuttering* by Bob Bodenhamer. Crown House Publishing Limited**

I am frequently asked how I got over my speech difficulties. After I tell my story, people naturally ask what they can do to follow a similar path. In particular, they want specific steps they can take to address the fears and panic associated with speech blocks. *I Have a Voice: How to Stop Stuttering* is a compendium of concepts and tools that use the principles of neuro-semantic (NS) – the latest form of mind management technology – to reframe the thinking that leads to speech blocks. Bob Bodenhamer is an authority in neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) as well as co-developer of neuro-semantic (NS). He is also a psychologist and therapist who has worked with scores of PWS. This has given him an intuitive understanding of the thought processes that underlie stuttering and blocking. The book will be extremely helpful to any PWS or therapist who needs tools for redefining self, altering mind states, remodeling, and changing the meaning of stuttering.

***Understanding and Controlling Stuttering: A Comprehensive New Approach Based on the Valsalva Hypothesis* by William D. Parry, Esq. Available from the National Stuttering Association.**

When traditional therapeutic approaches had little effect, attorney Bill Parry set out to solve his stuttering problem on his own. This book is based on original research he conducted that led to his own successful recovery. It is a brilliant presentation of how the misapplication of the Valsalva maneuver—the muscles involved with lifting, pushing, or “trying”—can lead to blocked speech. The book is extremely helpful in its detailed discussion of how speech is produced, and it offers an effective self-therapy program. You may also want to check Bill's web page at [www.valsalva.org](http://www.valsalva.org) to get an overview of Bill's ideas and links to Bill's talks and other resource material.

***The Highly Sensitive Person: How to Thrive When the World Overwhelms You* by Elaine N. Aron. Broadway Books.**

In her doctoral thesis research, NSA member Libby Oyler showed that stuttering children revealed significantly greater sensitivity and vulnerability than the group of nonstuttering children. Now you can read more about highly sensitive people in a ground breaking book by psychologist Elaine Aron. Aron's book defines a personality trait carried by an estimated 15-20% of the U.S. population. The trait is manifested as a highly sensitive nervous system that is present from birth and probably inherited, much like other personality traits or physical features. People possessing this trait are much more sensitive to nearly everything they experience, from the sensory

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characteristics of objects and events to the subtleties of inner feelings and relationships between people. Aron offers suggestions for contending with a highly sensitive nature so the individual can flourish (and survive) in a society that often fails to appreciate this trait, particularly in boys and men.

***When I Say No I Feel Guilty* by Manuel J. Smith. Bantam.**

Most people who stutter have difficulty in asserting themselves. Smith's book can help you clarify the confusion between aggression and self-assertion. It also provides useful ways to avoid those confrontations—real or imagined—that can lead you to initiate a fight-or-flight reaction and to hold back.

***Emotional Intelligence* by Daniel Goleman. Bantam Books.**

Many of us who stutter grow up failing to see the relationship between our emotions and our speech, but there is a close and definite tie. This landmark best seller contains a wealth of information on emotions and how they, more than our intellectual IQ, play the dominant role in controlling our life. The book is particularly rewarding in its description of the amygdala, that part of the brain that controls the flight-or-flight reaction that underlies most stuttering blocks.

***The Inner Game of Music* by Barry Green with W. Timothy Gallwey. Pan Books**

Several decades ago Timothy Gallwey took the ancient principles of zen and applied them to the mastery of various sports. His ground breaking book, *The Inner Game of Tennis*, was the first of several inner game books that show how the inner mind is the most powerful resource you have for attaining mastery and fluency in any activity. In the latest of the books, musician and teacher Barry Green shows how these principles also apply to the performance of music. This book is particularly relevant to anyone who deals with blocking and stuttering since playing music and speaking are both expressive forms of communication and are subject to the very same fears and creative blocks. The book is also a great primer for developing the state of mind necessary for effortless, spontaneous speech. If you want to understand what true fluency feels like, simply substitute "speech" whenever you see the word "music." The similarities are breathtaking.

***Awaken the Giant Within* by Anthony Robbins. Simon & Schuster.**

Tony Robbins has been called the acknowledged expert in the psychology of change. He is America's leader in the science of peak performance, and this book shows you his most effective strategies and techniques for mastering your emotions, your body, your relationships, and your life. If you want the best handbook in the world for what works in life and what doesn't, this is the one that will help you to discover your true purpose, take

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control of your life, and harness the forces that shape your destiny. It's packed with a ton of scientifically sound principles and techniques to get yourself moving. It's also easy reading.

***The Enneagram Made Easy: Discover the 9 Types of People***  
by Renee Baron, Elizabeth Wagele. Harper San Francisco.

This is one of many books currently available on the enneagram. The enneagram is a system describing nine basic personality types that has been gaining in popularity over the last three decades. Each of the nine types experiences the world in a different way. What type are you? How does your personality type normally react under stress? What are your predictable weakness and strengths? All this is directly relevant to your speech. Life becomes more manageable when you know that your traditional way of experiencing is not necessarily the way things "are." The book helps you become a more objective observer by alerting you to the unique ways your personality type is inclined to act under stress as well as when everything is going well. And it shows you which areas of development are likely to deliver the greatest returns.

***Why I Called My Sister Harry*** by Michael O'Shea.  
Trafford Publishing.

I first spoke to Michael O'Shea when he called me with questions on how the Stuttering Hexagon was being taught within the McGuire Programme. Michael had recently become a McGuire instructor, and he didn't think they were explaining the Hexagon correctly. They weren't, and I discussed the system with him at length. Two weeks later, he called back and gave *me* his presentation on the Hexagon, and I knew he had it. I subsequently met Michael in Dublin when I went to Ireland to teach a workshop, and we kept in touch. Now Michael has written a book that gives a detailed and revealing account of the evolution and impact of stuttering on his life as well as a deep understanding of his recovery. Theories on stammering abound, but the only way to really understand the nature of stuttering is to view it within the context of a person's life history. Nobody has documented the recovery process any better or more brilliantly than Michael O'Shea.

***Letters to a Desperate Stutterer*** by Linda Rounds. eBook.

**[www.digitalproductsreview.net/download/ccfluency.html](http://www.digitalproductsreview.net/download/ccfluency.html)**

Linda Rounds has written a fascinating recovery story with an emphasis on the cognitive point of view. Linda introduced me to neuro-semantics, and for that I will be forever grateful. As you read this eBook, you'll experience through Linda what it means to connect the dots as you empower yourself to live and speak like the person you always wanted to be. You can get a taste of Linda's writing in the essay she contributed to this book. Linda also started the lively internet forum on stuttering at <<http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/neurosemanticsofstuttering>> which has some of the most intelligent and informed on-line discussions on stuttering.

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***Choke: What the Secrets of the Brain Reveal about Getting It Right When You Have to* by Sian Beilock. Free Press.**

You can best understand the underpinnings of chronic stuttering and blocking by looking through some of the many articles and books on performance anxiety. Sian Beilock, Ph.D. is one of the world's leading researchers in human performance. In this fascinating and informative book she explains the underlying dynamics that determine individual triumph and failure. The book will give you a rich understanding of why and when people choke and more important, how to respond when under pressure.

***Performance Anxiety* by Eric Maisel, Ph.D. Back Stage Books.**

Eric Maisel is a San Francisco psychologist in San Francisco who works with people in the performing arts to overcome performance anxiety. The book is part text and part workbook, and although it is not written to address stuttering per se, most of what Dr. Maisel says has direct application. Dr. Maisel talks about the need to take charge of what you think. He observes that if you do not get a grip on your mind, it will do what it is built to do; that is, it will scan for threats and create anxiety. He talks about the importance of being honest about what you're thinking as well as the importance of living by your own principles. It includes a long-term plan for managing anxiety.

***The Art of Failure* by Malcolm Gladwell. [www.gladwell.com/2000/2000\\_08\\_21\\_a\\_choking.html](http://www.gladwell.com/2000/2000_08_21_a_choking.html). Free download on the Internet**

Malcolm Gladwell's best selling books such as *Blink* and *The Tipping Point* are notable for his overarching observations of human nature and behavior. This article which appeared in "The New Yorker" magazine explores why people choke under pressure. The narrative ranges from why leading golfers blow a commanding lead to what caused John Kennedy Jr.'s to crash his plane when flying in poor visibility.

***Speech Is A River: My Recovery from Stuttering* by Ruth Mead. Free eBook. [www.stutterers-anonymous.com](http://www.stutterers-anonymous.com)**

For several years after she wrote it, this book sat in Ruth's drawer because she felt it was so foreign to prevailing theories about stuttering that that nobody would "get" it. Then she discovered *REDEFINING STUTTERING* and suddenly there was another PWS who shared her vision and who, like her, had recovered. Ruth is a brilliant writer. She has a vibrant and entertaining style. She really has a handle on what her stuttering was about. And she recovered from a 30-year severe stutter in a way that I'd never heard of before.

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## SEVEN TIPS FOR TALKING WITH YOUR CHILD

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Compiled by Barry Guitar, Ph.D., University of Vermont, and Edward G. Conture, Ph.D., Vanderbilt University

*[Although this book is directed at adults who stutter, many people have questions about how to address young children with stuttering problems. That's a whole subject in itself and beyond the scope of this book. However, I thought that this list of seven tips would make a particularly helpful starting point for parents and others seeking more information on the subject. – JCH]*

1. Speak with your child in an unhurried way, pausing frequently. Wait a few seconds after your child finishes speaking before you begin to speak. Your own slow, relaxed speech will be far more effective than any criticism or advice such as “slow down” or “try it again slowly.”
  2. Reduce the number of questions you ask your child. Instead of asking questions, simply comment on what your child has said.
  3. Use your facial expressions and other body language to convey to your child that you are listening to the content of the message and not to how your child is talking.
  4. Set aside a few minutes at a regular time each day when you can give your undivided attention to your child. This quiet, calm time can be a confidence-builder for younger children.
  5. Help all members of the family learn to take turns talking and listening. Children, especially those who stutter, find it much easier to talk when there are few interruptions.
  6. Observe the way you interact with your child. Try to increase those times that give your child the message that you are listening to her and she has plenty of time to talk.
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7. Above all, convey that you accept your child as he is. The most powerful force will be your support of him, whether he stutters or not.

More helpful information for parents can be found at The Stuttering Foundation website at:

*<http://www.stutteringhelp.org/Default.aspx?tabid=131>.*

Also check the website of the National Stuttering Association at:

*<http://www.westutter.org/WhoWeHelp/parents/index.html>*

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## FORTY YEARS LATER

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I thought I would see if I could quickly profile my life in the forty years since my blocking disappeared. In particular, I'd try and answer the question—"What happens when a stutterer stops stuttering?"

Did I race confidently forward to pursue and embrace all those things that I was afraid to do because I stuttered?

Well...no. I wouldn't say that.

The dynamics that helped to drive my stuttering and blocking were still very much a part of me. I was still very much caught up in the feeling I had to perform. And I was still focused in a major way on pleasing others.

All this was translated into my lack of a life goal. Although I've become a pretty good writer of advertising, books and articles, a career in those areas wasn't ever anything I aspired to. When people asked me what my five-year goals were, I had none. I simply took jobs as they came up.

Yet there was one thing that tugged at me. I liked teaching. Years ago when I first came to San Francisco, my first roommate told me that I'd be good in front of people, but I quickly dismissed the thought. Just the idea of standing in front of all those "judges" made me a queezy. I didn't feel that what I had to say ever counted for anything. So I limited my focus to making a living and pursuing my curiosity about people.

However, I didn't know it then, but there actually were several threads that connected everything I did. I like making the complex simple. Advertising caters to that. You have product information you need to read and absorb. You have to learn about and understand the audience. And you have to find a creative way to translate the product benefits so the audience is motivated to buy. I find that challenging.

Similarly, I like writing the kinds of articles that appear in this book, because it involves puzzling things out. If in doing that I can pave new roads, the process becomes even more attractive. I'm also thrilled whenever I can do anything to help people become more empowered.

So you can see why the National Stuttering Association held great attraction to me. Over 30 years it became a major avocation as well as a proving ground for trying things out. All the activities I liked were embodied in my activities with the organization. Most important, there was no pressure to perform, because I was doing everything I did for free.

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In a personal training back in the 70s, the instructor said to us, “If you want to find out who you really are, notice what you do for free.”

How right he was.

The NSA gave me a place to find myself, and in particular, it has provided me an opportunity to pursue the one activity that held the most fear and attraction for me:

Teaching.

In the first NSP chapter meeting I ever facilitated (with much trepidation, I might add), I was teaching. There were plenty of performance issues, but it was something I wanted to do. And since nobody in the room knew more than I, it gave me the confidence to go ahead. Even so, as people were leaving and telling me I did a great job, all I could think of was, “Well, I SURE fooled them.”

In the 70s I had attended personal growth trainings, and strongly identified with the trainers who ran them. I loved the fact that they got to visit many different cities. But be a trainer myself? No way. However, in the early 80s I designed and ran a two-day workshop for the NSP (now the NSA) in the San Francisco area. Okay, so I was the only person who had ever been through a personal growth training. No matter. Since there was no one who knew enough to judge me, I was free to be myself.

In the mid-80s I wrote the first edition of this book—50 pages of speaking exercises plus one essay—and ran my first public speaking workshop at the NSA annual conference in Philadelphia. Wow.

As a result of that workshop, I was invited by the Houston chapter to fly to that city and do a weekend workshop. Double wow! I remember having been so envious of the trainers in the personal growth programs who went from one city to another. “I’m never going to be able to do that,” I thought.

Now I was doing it, thanks to the NSA.

And so it has gone. I ended up running NSA trainings in cities across the U.S. and Canada, as well trainings for other stuttering-related organizations in eight countries.

So much for not being able to run workshops and travel.

Still, much of the stuttering mentality continued to linger on. I could do these things within the stuttering world. But was I good enough to do it in the larger world? In business? For organizations?

When I went to the International Stuttering Association conference in Fremantle, Australia, the organizers kindly arranged for me to do a one-day public speaking seminar for the general public in nearby Perth so I could recoup my travel expenses. That was the very first training that was not for a stuttering audience. It went swimmingly.

Two months later a friend suggested I do a free public speaking

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workshop at the annual conference of the Institute of Management Consultants in Reno, Nevada.

Oh my god! If you wanted to see one nervous, uptight John Harrison, you would have found him in Reno. This was my second non-stuttering audience, and these people were Management Consultants. They were Authorities. They were Very Important People. My fears of authority figures kicked in big time.

I got through the 90-minute program okay though I was pretty up tight the whole time. Most people liked it. A few didn't. Still, the overall reviews were fairly good.

The barriers continued to fall. I rejoined Toastmasters after a 35-year absence. I became a member of two clubs, one for experienced speakers. In due course I ran a workshop for my San Francisco club which had a number of beginning speakers. Then I joined a business networking organization and eventually did a public speaking workshop for my chapter. This turned into the every-other-month workshop schedule that I now maintain for the general public.

I've also run several workshops for companies and other organizations.

Finally, after all these years, I ended up actually becoming the only thing I ever aspired to be:

A teacher.

The self-consciousness that had hounded me all my life also began to develop cracks. A big contributor to that was an article I wrote entitled "How Your Expectations Can Sink Your Ship." In getting clear about the distinction between running my life by my expectations vs. my intentions, I was able to see how much and how often I gave away my power to other people. The clearer I got about that, the more I realized that other people's opinions took second place to what I wanted to do. As I began to value and support the need to express myself honestly, my self-consciousness has fallen away. I will note your objection, disagreement, or dislike, but I'll continue to focus on fulfilling my intentions if I think they have merit.

It works. Amazing!

Perhaps the last step in my recovery occurred the day I realized I no longer wanted to remain on the stuttering Internet discussion groups. I had given it a good run, but I had moved on. Of course, I'm always delighted to hear from people and still try and be helpful when someone writes me or calls. But the late nights talking about stuttering on discussion groups are over.

However, the conversation hasn't ceased. I regularly chat with people all over the world on Skype (with video!) And I conduct paid coaching sessions on Skype with people who want to explore and transform their own stuttering hexagons.

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I hope you find this book useful. I give anybody and everybody permission to use this material however they see fit. You don't have to check with me. If you can make a difference out there—if you can help someone take the next step toward being the person they want to be—just do it. Get out the word. That's how we'll lick this thing.

I thought I'd end with the final email I posted to the *neurosemanticsofstuttering* discussion group.

*This will be my absolute last post on this list. I decided to stay around for one more week, and I was really touched by the nice comments I received from many of you. I've been on stuttering lists since the early 1990s when I first joined the Stutt-L listserv. Stutt-L was the first really big Internet discussion group on stuttering. And a whole lot of ground breaking ideas were shared and explored here.*

*I spent many nights into the early morning hours writing out what I had found out about stuttering, and a good many of my longer posts evolved into chapters for this book. Without question, the best way to learn something is to teach it to others. I know that many of you have also experienced the truth of this.*

*Most of the significant ideas I've heard over the last 30 years about stuttering have come from the stuttering community...from people like you. This makes perfect sense. Joel Arthur Barker in his book *Paradigms* addresses this issue at length. He says that significant paradigm shifts, such as the one happening now with stuttering, will seldom come from the established community (in this case, the speech pathologists and researchers.) Rather, they'll come from those who sit outside the established paradigms held by that community — in this case, the actual PWS and “outsiders” like Bob Bodenhamer, cofounder of *neurosemantics* who has worked with many PWS.*

*After all, if you want to think outside the box, it helps if you're not living INSIDE the box.*

*Academics are influenced by the professional books, papers, ideas and discussions they are exposed to in school. Their framework is set by everything that's come before. That body of knowledge is hard for them to challenge, and the tendency is to accept that information on face value. After all, it has been published, hasn't it? Then it must be true. (How many students have enough nerve to question their textbooks?)*

*Furthermore, researchers are committed to following a formal protocol when they research and develop new ideas and theories. This formal protocol works very well for the hard sciences like biology and physics. It can also work well for the social sciences...PROVIDED the problem can be broken down into meaningful segments that can be isolated and studied using a scientific method.*

*The problem is that much about stuttering does not lend itself to study through a formal scientific method in which you isolate a part of the problem, propose a*

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theory and then test only for that theory. Stuttering/blocking is too “messy,” too intertwined with the individual’s personality. Some things are better studied empirically through observation and personal experience. (This process was followed by Charles Darwin in developing his theories on evolution and the survival of the fittest.)

Most of the difficulties in understanding stuttering relate to the fact that, for the last century, the phenomenon has not been correctly characterized. At least in my opinion and the opinion of a growing number of others. This has biased everything that’s been written about stuttering. Furthermore, it’s very difficult to study a problem in isolation when the workings of that problem are closely tied into the workings of a larger system—OF WHICH THAT SEGMENT IS ONLY A PART.

To use an old analogy, it’s like trying to define an elephant by ONLY studying one of its parts, like the trunk, the leg, or the tail. It can’t be done. You must look at the whole elephant if you want to place the part that you study in the proper context.

I’m certainly not putting down the reading of books. That can be really useful. But it’s not useful if what you read ends up blinding you to what’s going on right under your very nose.

Other people’s ideas have a way of setting up expectations that color your perception so you can’t see what’s true for you. The best way to learn about stuttering is empirically, by personally listening, trying, exploring, experimenting (as well as reading, not just about stuttering but about related subjects as well.) I didn’t need to set up a formal study to see how I would speak if I changed the way I breathed. If I had a theory, all I had to do was to get on a bus and ask for a transfer. I could tell in an instant if I was on to something or not. I could try a hundred different things in the time it took for a formal academic study to look at just one of those factors.

Thanks to the Internet, every single person on this list has the potential to advance the common knowledge around stuttering and blocking. Each of you has had unique experiences and insights, which are potential enlightenment triggers for other list members. Each of you has the potential to come up with ideas that are instrumental in transforming our understanding of stuttering.

We are a powerful group. And we will continue to be so as long as we remain vital and active.

That said, it’s time for me to close. I have another book I want to write. I have a public speaking business that I’ve been dancing around but not really taking charge of. I need to stop doing that. I need to start applying myself. As long as I automatically log onto the neurosemanticsofstuttering site every time I turn on my computer and spend hours writing emails that are often this long and longer, I’ll be keeping myself smack in the middle of my comfort zone and not pushing out into those areas of discomfort where real growth and advancement are possible. I need

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*to remove this temptation.*

*However, I look forward to staying in touch with all of you. I can be reached at several email addresses including <johnnyh567@aol.com> and <stutterhexagon@aol.com>. Let me know what's going on with you.*

*Okay, this time it's for real....*

*Over and out.*

*All the best,*

*John*

POSTSCRIPT: I remained off the neurosemanticsofstuttering list for a full year. Quite frankly, after 17 years it was a relief not to receive the flood of stuttering-related emails every day, especially since they seemed to be going over the same old material. And I did focus my efforts into other activities.

But I didn't cut my ties completely. I arranged for the list to send me daily summaries of email activity although I would delete them unread. Then one day I became curious as to what was going on, so I opened one of the summaries and read the day's postings.

I was stunned. A whole new group was creating lively conversation and exploring new areas. Some of the members were clients I was coaching. Others were people I had chatted with from various countries. There appeared to be a high level of understanding of the stuttering system. People were really supporting one another. The creativity was flowing. Now that was exciting, so I answered one of the emails.

Today, I'm back on the list. I also continue to run an active coaching practice for PWS by phone and Skype (see details at the end of this book.)

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## THE POWER OF INTENTION

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So here we are at the end of the book, and you're probably thinking, "Can I really learn to speak without stuttering, or at the very least, without fear of stuttering?"

- How much time and effort will it take?
- If I'm successful, will I be able to get a better job or make more money?
- Will I be able to talk in any situation?
- Will I be able to achieve the things I want?
- What will life be like?

Those are the questions that everyone who's ever dealt with personal challenges has pondered. I know, because for years that's what I thought about during my efforts to overcome my own life issues. The self-improvement books were all good reading. But acting on the information...well, that was a different story. For this book to have an impact on you, something has to change, and it's more than just your speech.

You have to take action. So what's likely to hold you back?

What will hold you back is if you allow your life to be run by your expectations.

Let's see why this is so.

### *A FISH STORY*

Some time ago I heard about a fascinating laboratory experiment. A biologist filled a large fish tank with water and separated it into two sections with a glass divider. On one side he introduced a good-sized bass. On the other, he released a school of tiny minnows. He wanted to see how the bass would react.

For one full week the bass continually beat on the divider, trying to get at the minnows without luck. The next week, it still kept trying, but as the week progressed, the bass slowly lost interest. By the third week, it had learned that it could not get to the minnows and stopped trying altogether.

Then the scientist removed the glass divider. What do you think happened?

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Did the bass say to itself, “Whoopee, I can finally gobble up those minnows!”

It did not.

In fact, the minnows even swam around its mouth and the bass paid them absolutely no attention. After all, the bass had found out what was “possible” and what was not. Its expectations had been set. It was an experiment that can be easily replicated.

Now be candid. Does that bass sound like you? Have you let your expectations run your life? Have you let the beliefs and survival strategies of childhood limit your possibilities as an adult?

Do you know that things won’t work out so you don’t even try? And do you miss even seeing those opportunities swimming in front of your very nose?

If so, you may be responding just like that bass.

Fortunately, unlike the bass, you have options. You have a choice in how you want to run your life.

- You can base your motivation and self-esteem on how others judge you and on whether or not your activities were successful.
- Or you can base it on how successfully you’ve defined and followed your intentions.

For most of my life I ran my life by my expectations. If I tried something half a dozen times and it didn’t work out the way I hoped and expected it to, I would get discouraged and go on to something else. I had little staying power. So you can imagine how shocked I felt when I read the following story.

## *INTENTIONS VS. EXPECTATIONS*

Thomas Edison was a man whose expectations went unmet so many times you’d think his life was one of total discouragement. Quite the contrary, Edison was America’s greatest and most successful inventor. Over his lifetime, he patented 1,093 inventions, more than the next two most prolific inventors combined.

In 1878, Edison created a prototype for the incandescent light bulb. It consisted of a thin strip of paper attached to wires at either end and sealed in a vacuum inside a glass bulb. When electricity flowed through the wires into the paper filament, it heated up and glowed. Voilà, light. It had only one drawback. The paper burned up in seconds. Clearly, not a successful commercial product.

So Edison set out to find a material for the filament that would burn bright enough and long enough to be commercially viable. He searched the world over for every conceivable material that might work. He tested

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filaments made from every plant and tree imaginable — bamboo, baywood, boxwood, cedar, flax, hickory.... He wrote to biologists who sent him plant fibers from exotic jungles in the tropics. He even tested a hair from the beard of his lab assistant. Nothing met his requirements.

Do you know how many different materials Edison tested until he found something that did work?

Over 6,000!

I found this unbelievable. Six tries, and I would lose interest whereas Edison had 6,000 failures in a row and still kept going until he discovered that a carbonized cotton thread would meet his requirements.

What kept him from becoming discouraged and quitting?

Two things. First, Edison liked what he was doing. He just liked being in the laboratory and conducting experiments, and that made his efforts worthwhile. (How many PWS are doing work that truly reflects who they are and what they like?)

Equally important, Edison didn't measure himself by how well his expectations were met. Certainly, he had expectations (in this case over 6,000 of them that didn't work out!). But Edison was motivated by his intentions. So whenever an experiment was unsuccessful, Edison would simply turn and say to his lab assistants, "Well gentlemen, now we know a little more about the problem." Thus, even those experiments that didn't meet his expectations were still experienced as having value.

I know what you're thinking. "All well and good, but I'm not Edison. I have a good job, but it's not been my life's passion. I'm not totally dedicated to a single life purpose. How can I keep myself going when things don't work out over and over again?"

Perhaps this next story will help answer this question.

### *THEY KEPT CALLING HER "HEY STUPID."*

She was a young girl who grew up in a suburban community south of San Francisco. She was a pretty girl, but nobody thought she was particularly bright. In fact, her two sisters regularly addressed her as "Hey, stupid."

Even so, she was conscientious and hard working. At the age of 14 she worked part time at Mervyns, a clothing store chain, and her supervisor liked her so well that the following year they even made her an assistant manager.

But she was not popular in school. In her senior year her good looks did get her elected homecoming football queen but ironically, she wasn't even able to find a date to take her to the big game.

She didn't go to college. A year later, she met a graduate student from

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Stanford University. They fell in love and married. You could pretty much write the scenario. Pretty girl marries guy, has nice home in the suburbs with two cars and a dog. Raises a couple of kids. Barbecues on the weekends. Joins the country club. Becomes a soccer mom.

Except it didn't happen that way.

The girl loved to bake. Specifically, she loved to bake chocolate chip cookies. One day she had a brainstorm. "I'm going to open a cookie shop."

She went out looking for a bank loan. Being young and inexperienced and not having any of her own money to invest did not make her attractive to lending organizations. She received rejections one after the other. But she wanted to open a cookie shop. Her *intention* was to open a cookie shop. So she kept on looking. And after more than 20 attempts, she finally found a bank that agreed to loan her the money...at an exorbitant 21% interest!

Opening day came, and by noon, she hadn't made a single sale. Discouraging? Of course. But she had a very clear intention to sell cookies. So after lunch, she piled a plate full of cookies and walked up and down the main street of her town, handing out free samples. By the end of the day, she had sold \$75 worth of cookies, and her passion had suddenly become her business.

In case you don't know, I'm talking about Debbie Fields, creator of Mrs. Fields Cookies, whose chain of over 1400 stores has more than \$400 million in sales per year.

There are thousands of stories like this one – stories about people who had every reason not to push forward. And still did.

But how do you keep up your spirits when things aren't working?

## *AN AMAZING, YET SIMPLE STRATEGY*

In the last few years, I've been following a strategy that works so well I regret I never stumbled on it sooner. It's so simple you won't believe how well it works. But it does. Here's the strategy:

I reward myself for following my intentions, no matter how the results turn out. Yes, you heard that right. If I give it my best shot and it doesn't work out, then I provide the reward.

Let's say I make a presentation to my business networking group, and it falls totally flat (this really happened). I ask myself two questions: (1) What was my intention? And (2) did I follow my intention?

If I clearly defined and then followed my intention, THEN I REWARD MYSELF...*not for having success (which in this case I didn't have), but for following through on what I set out to do.*

Here's what I do for the really big disasters. In my neighborhood, we have an ice cream store that has the world's best mocha fudge ice cream.

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Whenever I do something particularly difficult...especially something that didn't work out to my standards... I reward myself with a BIG scoop of mocha fudge ice cream.

I do this whether or not I got the results I wanted!

As I slowly enjoy the ice cream, I remind myself that I've given myself this treat for clearly defining and following my intentions. This step is extremely important. You don't have to buy yourself a gift or stuff yourself on fattening food. But some tangible recognition of what you've done will go far to build your confidence and self-esteem.

I also follow the example of Thomas Edison. If my efforts are not successful, I tell myself, "Well, now I know a little bit more about the problem." This process is effective in yet another way: it disables the negative self-talk that used to consume me after unsatisfying results. It brings it all to a screeching halt.

Tangible reward plus the chance to learn something valuable — it's a no-lose proposition.

### *HOW DOES THIS RELATE TO STUTTERING?*

Those of us who grow up with stuttering live in a world of expectations. From an early age, we become outwardly focused. Our fortunes...our very survival...depend on whether others like and accept us. We think that whether we're okay, whether we have standing in our class, our social group or our community all hang on whether we fit in. We believe in our hearts that people won't like us if we can't talk like them. So we mold and shape our personality in order to fit what we think other people expect from us.

And what gets lost is ourselves.

We watch others hawk-like to see whether what we do and want and say is approved. If our friends and associates like us, then we feel validated. If not, we feel disempowered. If projects work out successfully, we hold our head high. If they don't work out, we desperately hope that people will still want us, so we mold ourselves in other people's eyes so we can be likeable.

Oh, some of us hide this very well, even from ourselves. We tell ourselves we really like the other guy's ideas, and that it doesn't matter.

But it does.

As time goes on, these hundreds of day-to-day compromises add up and become our point of view about life. It becomes standard operating procedure to automatically see anything that happens from this perspective. It becomes The Way It Is.

Eventually, we leave childhood and grow into adults without a strong

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sense of identity. We don't acknowledge what we like and want because to do so might require taking an unpopular position. We don't pursue activities and careers because we don't think we can do them...not only because of our speech, but because we learned early on that what we feel and want don't count. So we end up working in jobs we don't like. We enter into unions we don't deeply care for. We adopt lifestyles that are passable but passionless. And when we see something that really attracts us, we turn the other way.

This unhappy state of affairs is often driven by factors not directly identified with stuttering such as a lack of self-knowledge, an inability to assert oneself, and an inability to establish meaningful relationships. Such individuals tend to blame their unhappiness on stuttering. But how about all the PWS who, for one reason or another, do not opt for fluency as much as total freedom of self-expression, and lead successful, fulfilling lives. They say what they want...to whom they want...the way they want.

One shining example is Russ Hicks, a long time and very active member of the National Stuttering Association. Russ' intention was to remove the barriers between himself and what he wanted to do. And despite an intractable stutter, he has done just that.

Even though he periodically struggles with his speech, Russ has evolved into a first class speaker and the only member in NSA history to become a regional winner of a Toastmaster competition. (Russ sent me the videotape of the presentation, and he was really good.) He has started and mentored many Toastmaster clubs over his long involvement with the organization. And he has earned the title of Distinguished Toastmaster, which is the highest level of achievement. He continues to pursue what he likes and wants in life, even though total fluency still eludes him. Would total fluency change Russ' life? Maybe a little, but probably not much. He's already living the life he wants. Russ runs his life by his intentions.

Andrew Rees whose email correspondence appears earlier suffered many setbacks along the way. Yet he persisted on his path of one step backward and two steps forward until his stuttering was a thing of the past. Andrew ran his life by his intentions.

By not surrendering, you keep yourself open to opportunities. In repeatedly asking those two key questions — "What is my intention?" and "Did I follow my intention?"— and by always rewarding yourself for following your intention – you can slowly migrate from a person who's focused on pleasing others to a person who's major commitment is to do what is important to you.

Never lose sight of the fact that, as challenging as it may be, you still have the power to determine the way you want to live.

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## ONE FINAL QUESTION

The subject invariably comes up with anybody who's ever stuttered and blocked. It may be a fleeting thought. It may be an obsession. But for anyone who's trying to recover from stuttering, the question is always the same.

"Suppose I can't keep motivated?"

I can't tell you how many times I've set my sights on accomplishing a goal, only to quickly lose steam. It happened with hatha yoga. A dozen years ago I decided to loosen up my body and committed to a three-time-a-week schedule of hatha yoga stretches. The first week I did great and achieved my objective. But the second week I missed a day, so I decided I'd need to do it four times the following week.

Wrong.

It suddenly became an obligation. My rebellion arose. And that was it for hatha yoga.

The question remains – How does one keep motivated?

Here's one way: combine the activity you resist doing with an activity you like doing.

For example, I find riding the stationery bicycle to be a big bore. Thirty minutes of pedaling to nowhere. I don't know how some people do it – pedaling hard as they stare into space. But I found a solution. Whenever I work out on the stationary bike, I read a book. Not just any book, but a book I really, really like. And I only read that book when I pedal. So if I want to find out what happens, I have to exercise.

How that applied to my stuttering was simple. I love finding out about people and what motivates them to act. My decade of exploration in the personal growth environment of California in the 60s was fascinating. I was constantly swept away with the sense of discovery as I gave myself permission to express what I felt and try new ways to relate...even though they sometimes ended in (what I thought was) disaster. A by-product of those activities was that I was able to reconnect to the real me. I was able to explore and resolve the points of my Stuttering Hexagon, and over time my stuttering system slowly dissolved.

The truth is, if you want to recover from stuttering, it's hard to do it alone. It really helps to have understanding people in your corner who will support and encourage you.

This is why programs like Toastmasters and Speakers Clubs are so important and why personal growth programs and other programs like the McGuire training increase the chances of success. Everyone is pulling for you as well as for themselves. At the very least, cruise the Internet for ideas. And play an active role on stuttering-related discussion groups such as the

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one I consider my my favorite at <http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/neurosemanticsofstuttering>. Start relating and sharing with the many hundreds of sympathetic people who are dealing with their own stuttering issues. They will constitute your cheering section even as you play the same role for them.

Okay. I've said my piece. Remember, you don't have to do it alone. There are many people all over the world who will be only too happy to support you, including me. All you have to do is let us know what your ambitions are and then take that first step.

Are you ready?

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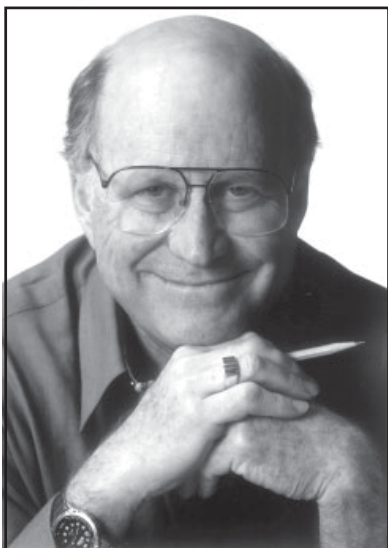


## COACHING

John Harrison does one-hour personal coaching sessions by phone or Skype on the Stuttering Hexagon. If you'd like to get to know and understand your stuttering system and develop strategies for defeating it, email John at [stutterhexagon@aol.com](mailto:stutterhexagon@aol.com) for a free, half-hour introductory session. You can also reach him by Skype at [jcharr1234](https://www.skype.com/jcharr1234) or by phone at 415-647-4700.

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**John C. Harrison** showed a marked disfluency at the age of three and two years later underwent several weeks of speech therapy in New York City. But these early efforts at therapy were not productive and he struggled with stuttering throughout college and well into adulthood.

John's involvement in a broad variety of personal growth programs over three decades have given him a unique insight into the nature and dynamics of the stuttering person. Today, he is fully recovered and no longer deals with stuttering.

One of the earliest members of the National Stuttering Project (now the National Stuttering Association), he was a long-term member of the Board of Directors and previously served for 14 years as the NSA's Associate Director. He also served for nine years as the editor of the NSA's monthly newsletter *Letting GO*.

John has run workshops for the stuttering and the professional communities across the U.S. and Canada as well as in England, Ireland, Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Australia, and he has been a regular presenter NSA national conferences. He has been published in *Advance Magazine* and the *Journal of Fluency Disorders*. He has presented at ASHA and CSHA conventions as well as at the First World Congress on Fluency Disorders in Munich, Germany.

He was a keynote speaker at the 2002 Annual Meeting of the British Stammering Association, the Seventh World Congress of the International Stuttering Association held in 2004 in Freemantle, Australia, and the 2007 NSA Annual Conference in Atlanta. You can see a video of John speaking at Toastmasters at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=kfzvO4Sj9IA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kfzvO4Sj9IA).

John holds a B.A. in English from Dartmouth College and did extensive graduate work in Language Arts at San Francisco State University. He lives with his wife, Doris, a graphic designer and teacher, in San Francisco where he works as a freelance writer and public speaking coach. Questions and comments may be directed to John at 3748 22nd Street, San Francisco, California 94114. Ph: 415-647-4700. email: [stutterhexagon@aol.com](mailto:stutterhexagon@aol.com). Skype: [jcharr1234](https://www.skype.com/en/contacts/jcharr1234).

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