

And The Stuttering Just Dies

By: Jack Menear

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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 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 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 let his words flow; it never occurs to him to anticipate his words or control how each word leaves his mouth.

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 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.

- (a) 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.
- (b) 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.
- (c) My mind is not preoccupied with thoughts of attack or defense.
- (d) 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.

- (e) 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.
- (f) I try to be totally involved with everything I do, but I'm not preoccupied with the results of my action.
- (g) 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.)
- (h) 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) 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.
- (j) 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.
- (k) 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.

(added November 5, 1995 - JAK)