

Stay Associated for Success

By Noel Kierans

It's championship day and the score is tied 1:1 with little time left in 2nd half of my soccer game. Suddenly my teammate is fouled in the penalty box. The referee points to the spot for a penalty kick. An anxious and nervous feeling fills my body as I'm the designated penalty taker. If I begin to worry about the result of missing, I will become **disassociated**. Disassociation would create tension in my body and cause me to miss. Disassociation is like an awful out-of-body experience.

Using my experience I refocus myself. I get myself **associated** with the task at hand. I close my eyes and pre-frame. I fill my mind full of positive thoughts and positive past experiences. I visualize myself taking a flawless penalty kick and scoring. I **welcome** the emotions that visualization brings. Then I take the ball from the referee; place it on the penalty spot. My opponents are doing everything they can to put me off, to disassociate me from the present. I'm in the **zone** though, I'm totally associated. When the referee blows his whistle I take three strides and confidently place the ball into the corner of the goal, just like I had visualized. The anxious and nervous feeling is replaced with joy and **confidence** as I celebrate with my teammates. We go on to win the game and I'm the MVP.

My name is Noel Kierans and I've had a stutter/stammer for 33 years. I used to become disassociated before stuttering. When anticipating a stutter I used to look away from my listener and block. I learned that eye contact aversion is related to self-consciousness about stuttering; another symptom of disassociation. I also used to change words and avoid talking. I was so worried what others would think- *mindreading* and *projecting*- that I was not **present**.

Ten months ago I gathered the courage to call Tim Mackesey. Tim has taught me several **tools** to help me stay associated; **reframing**, pre-framing, the Meta Alignment Pattern, to name a few. One of my favorite tools is using "Meta Alignment Pattern" to help me **pre-frame** and keep me associated before speaking engagements. Pre-framing and staying associated is like playing in the "zone". While in the zone nothing can distract you, you feel like you can do anything. It is when we get distracted, disassociated, go Meta, that we miss our target.

When I was younger and a less experienced soccer player I missed a few penalty kicks. Looking back on those awful moments I found a common ingredient, I became disassociated; I let negative thoughts fill my mind as I ran up to kick the ball. I went **Meta**. As a result, I missed the target or the goalkeeper saved my kick because I mis-kicked the ball. What's different now? With practice, dedication, and perseverance, I've been able to reframe my old movies of missed penalty kicks and replace them with successful ones. Subsequently, my confidence had grown too. Now, when my team gets a penalty kick I'm not as anxious or nervous about taking the penalty kick. Instead, my pre-framing tools **automatically** kick-in to keep me associated.

Any golfer reading this can relate to the experience of missing a putt because he was focused on the penalty of missing it. A basketball player can miss one from the line if he worries about the ramifications of not making the hoop. After a tennis player has her first service fault she better get associated to get the next serve in! All these athletes must stay present, remain associated, and **visualize** the ball going in. Why do you think Tiger Woods is as good as he is? He's able to reframe bad shots instantly and automatically, never letting poor shots affect the next one. He stays associated, always in the "**zone**".

I am writing this article not only to thank Tim for empowering me to improve my life. I also want this article to act as a wakeup call to those of you, who like me not so long ago, thought they had to face stuttering/stammering alone. I encourage you to take the first step of contacting a good speech therapist/coach. Why did I choose Tim? Tim himself has lived with stuttering his whole life. I thought no better person would relate to what's going on in my body and mind than someone who has faced these same feelings themselves.

Just three months after starting therapy with Tim we co-presented at the National Stuttering Association Convention in Atlanta, Georgia. Standing in front of roughly 100 people and speaking with ease was like winning the World Cup in soccer.

There is no magic pill!! I continue to use the tools Tim has given me. I am only seeing Tim once a month to help me stay focused. I am committed to this journey. I accept the **challenge** every day. I embrace the positive experiences and learn from the not so positive ones. I believe it's all about **dedication** to the cause and continuous improvement. I wish you the best of luck with your journey. Thanks.

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