

I HAVE A VOICE



HOW TO
STOP STUTTERING

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Foreword to the paperback edition by

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Foreword to the paperback edition

by Bob G. Bodenhamer and L. Michael Hall

Stuttering is in the shadows of public awareness and has been for years. But no more! Now there is a movie that is bringing it forth front and center. Sure, no one dies from stuttering, and it is not pervasive: only one percent of people stutter. Yet it is a malady that has not received a great deal of attention.

But no longer is it in the shadows. In November 2010, a movie brought stuttering to the world's attention. *The King's Speech*, a British historical drama directed by Tom Hooper and written by David Seidler made stuttering part of the public conversation. Moviegoers learned of the embarrassing pain that most People Who Stutter (PWS) suffer. But, even more than that, Lionel Logue, the speech trainer in the movie, brings into focus this shocking fact: stuttering is not about speech! It is about the "thinking" that is mostly unconscious and in "the back of the mind" of the PWS.

Positioned in the 1930s, the movie is about the young man who became the King of England just prior to the Second World War. It reveals the painful experiences that stuttering created for him. Logue, an Australian, who became the King's speech trainer, used techniques to enable the King to gain more control of his stuttering in ways that were quite advanced for that time. Many things in this movie give support to the theories that you will find in the pages of this book.

So what did Logue do? Mainly and primarily he challenged the mental frames that created the stuttering. He knew that stuttering was not a problem of flawed neurology or genetics. He knew that it was a problem of the person's attitudes and beliefs (mental frames) about stuttering. To create a good case of stuttering, there are certain belief frames a person has to adopt. The person has to believe such things as:

- Mis-speaking is a terrible, horrible, and awful experience.
- Mis-speaking means “I’m inadequate as a person.”
- Mis-speaking means “No one will like me, want to be around me, value me, love me. They will laugh at me and reject me.”
- Mis-speaking means “I have to stop myself from stuttering and pay attention to each and every word that comes out of my mouth.”
- Mis-speaking means “It’s impossible. I can’t stop it. Trying to stop it only makes it worse. I must indeed be inadequate as a human being.”
- Mis-speaking means “I cannot have a career nor can I ever marry – who would want to marry me?”

Mis-speaking is terrifying because of the meanings given to it. It is the meanings given to stuttering that this book addresses. *The King’s Speech* serves as a support for the radical views contained within this work. Indeed, we believe that stuttering is a phobia of mis-speaking, with the painful feelings being located in the throat and other muscles that are involved in speaking. If you do not believe this, look up the diagnosis of a panic attack in the DSM-IV¹. Does the description of a panic attack not describe exactly what you experience when you are having a speech block?

Logue knew this as he so passionately tries to get the King to understand that stuttering is about a specific behavior, speaking, and not about who he is. Logue as much says, “Bertie, your brain isn’t broken. It is doing exactly what you instruct it to do. The problem is your mental frames about stuttering!” The mental frames listed above are the frames that create the problem. And that is why when you change those frames, the stuttering behavior changes.

In the movie, *The King’s Speech*, you see Logue’s actions as he assists Bertie, the King, in changing his mental frames. We have identified six key mental frames that were driving Bertie’s stuttering:

1. Demanding-ness – Logue challenges his frames about demanding-ness. “Bertie, call me Lionel; here we are equals.” This changes the context (which changes meaning). Later he says, “Say it to me as a friend.”

2. Exceptions – We have found out that most every PWS has exceptions – places, times, and people – with whom and where they do not stutter. When do you not stutter? Do you stutter with your dog? Do you stutter when you are alone? Do you stutter when among trusted friends? In the movie, Logue asks, “Do you stutter when you think?” “No, of course not.” Ah, so here’s an exception! So you do know how to think or pray or talk to your dog without stuttering! So if there’s an exception, what is the difference that makes a difference in that exception? If you develop that, you’ll have developed a powerful first step to a resolution.

3. Singing – In the movie, Logue asks Bertie to sing it. Find a tune that you know well and whatever it is that you are trying to say, sing it. “Let the sounds flow,” Logue explains. This accepts the experience and changes one element in it. The King thinks it silly, ridiculous, and refuses to do it at first, but then he finds that he can move through the blocking by using a tune and putting the words to the tune. Singing creates both rhythm and air flow, both of which aid the PWS in speaking fluently.

4. Judgmentalism – It takes Logue a long time, but eventually the King talks about being mercilessly teased about his mis-speaking as a young boy. He was teased by his brother who put him down and who judged him because he stuttered. Important to the creation of negative meaning frames, Bertie’s father also judged him harshly without showing any mercy. This is deadly to the PWS. Logue comments:

“You don’t need to be afraid of the things you were afraid of at five. You are your own man now.”

What great frames! The past-is-the-past and what you feared as a five-year-old doesn’t need to be fearful now as a man. You once were controlled by others, now you are your own person. Breaking these judgment frames is critical. PWS have to master the childish fear that others will judge them for failing to be fluent.

And yet, even more important, is that they will have to master their own self-judgments.

The movie portrays this in a fascinating way. It occurs when Logue invites the King to read a famous text. When he does so, because he can hear himself, he is simultaneously judging himself. But when Logue turns up some music and plays it so loudly the King cannot hear himself reading, he reads the literature fluently, only he does not recognize it. And because he is so impatient, so self-critical, so non-accepting of the process, he storms out. However, he takes with him the recording that Logue has made and at a later time, late at night, he puts on the record and listens. He is amazed! The recording only recorded his voice and not the loud music – and he was reading fluently. Why? What was the difference? When he could not hear himself, he was unable to judge himself.

5. True to your own emotions – The movie portrays another process when Logue provokes the King to anger. He notices that when the King gets angry enough to curse, at that point he does not stutter. “Do you know the ‘F’ word?” he asks. At another time he “reproves” and “commands” him regarding sitting in a chair, “You can’t sit there!” It frustrates and angers the King to be talked to that way by a commoner! Logue thus brings his ability to be fluent-while-cursing to his attention.

What’s going on here? Bertie is frustrated and angry enough to curse – and when he curses, he is fluent! When he curses, he moves beyond the frame of caring what people may think should he stutter. Bertie is true to his emotions – to himself. This leads to fluency, because, generally speaking, PWS dismiss their emotions. Indeed, they believe that to give themselves permission to feel their emotions will result somehow in their being hurt. This belief is rooted in Bertie’s childhood experiences with his brother and his father.

6. Focusing elsewhere – Finally there is the scene where Logue brings Bertie into his home. There is a model plane on the table in the process of being put together. When the King was a child he was not allowed to play with model planes, so Logue encourages him to play with it. As he becomes preoccupied and focuses on the plane, his speech gets more and more fluent. Ah, again, this is an

experience that moves him outside of his usual frames of judgment, of disapproval, and of over-consciousness of speaking.

Due to his lack of knowledge of the yet-to-be-discovered field of cognitive psychology, Logue was limited in what he could do to help the King. The book you now have in your hand is filled with suggestions and patterns that will assist you in changing those negative meanings that have been driving your stuttering. Remember, as with the King, when you change the meanings about stuttering, the speaking changes. And that's the potential we wish for you to unleash!

Notes:

1 *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition* (DSM-IV). (2000). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Our first article on stuttering was based on basic general semantic ideas. You can find it at: <http://www.masteringstuttering.com/articles/how-to-create-a-good-dose-of-stuttering/>.

Chapter Three

Changing Points of View

The nature of communication

Given that blocking has a cognitive component, then we can begin to explore ways of changing that blocking behavior by changing the way the PWS communicates.

Why do you communicate to others? This is not a trick question. The answer is that essentially you communicate to other people because you want them to do something. You establish an outcome or intention which involves them changing in some way, and then do whatever is necessary to try to achieve that. Even in the most friendly, laid-back situations, you want other people to listen to your stories and respond to them. There is a huge difference between communicating to another person, and talking to the furniture; in the former case, you expect some kind of response.

You communicate because you want to change the world in some way. Therefore it helps to be clear about what exactly it is that you want to happen, what exactly it is you want to be different. That is why this chapter covers creating *well-formed outcomes*, because every act of communication implies some kind of purpose or outcome.

An over-riding concern for the PWS is to be fluent. But not always. They may say that they want to be comfortable with themselves even though they stutter. I hear this a lot: “Bob, just get me to where I stop beating myself up because I stutter.” “Just get me to where I am OK with myself and not so overly anxious because I stutter.” These people seem to know that once they get to where they are comfortable with themselves even though they stutter, the main issues are resolved. Their conversational outcome is the same as with “normal” people.

There is a saying: “You get what you concentrate on.” If you think about the horrible things that could happen to you ... well, you know what? They do. Therefore part of the changing of your behavior is changing the content of your thoughts. This means paying attention to what comes to the forefront of your mind, and noticing whether you are counting your blessings or on the lookout for disasters, threats, or someone to blame!

What is your point of view?

Most people make movies in their mind when they think about what they do. Recall what you did when you got up this morning. Most people remember past events as if they are watching movies of what happened – though obviously these mental movies have different qualities from looking at the world in the here and now.

There are some interesting variations in the way people see their movies. One significant difference is:

- You are actually *in* the movie, looking out through your eyes at what is happening around you.
- You can *see yourself* acting in the movie. It is as though you are in a cinema watching everything that is happening at a distance on the screen.

Of course, you may use both of these points of view at different times, but you probably have a preference. You may be able to switch from one mode to the other easily at will. This distinction is important, because in the first case, the *associated* version, you are also strongly connected to your emotions. Your mind does not really distinguish between something happening “for real” and your remembered version of it. If you are associated in the memory, it can still have an emotional impact. Experience this for yourself:

- Recall a mildly unpleasant memory. If you see yourself in that memory – *dissociated* – then deliberately associate into the memory and notice if your feelings increase.

Most people recall painful memories as associated, but not everyone. Some only associate into those memories that are extremely painful.

Exercise 3.1: The lemon

Try this:

Imagine opening the door of your refrigerator and taking out a lemon. Close the door, take a knife, put the lemon on the cutting board. Slice the lemon into halves, and then into quarters. Pick up one of the quarters and put that slice of lemon into your mouth. Squeeze it and feel the lemon juice squirting into your mouth. Are you salivating yet?

Most people find an increase in salivation. This simple experiment illustrates how the mind does not differentiate between real and imaginary experiences.

On the other hand, if you were watching a movie of yourself doing that, it is highly likely that your response would not be as strong. When you are observing what happened from the outside, from a *dissociated* position, you are usually more objective and not connecting with those feelings in the same way. You can evaluate your experience and have feelings about it, but you are not going to be so caught up in them as when you are associated. This associated/dissociated distinction is important in some of the exercises and processes that follow.

When you switch from an associated memory to a dissociated one, note how your feelings diminish when you dissociate from the memory and see yourself in it.

Focus of attention

Whether or not someone blocks depends on how they perceive the situation they are in. Another distinction looks at what specifically they are paying attention to in the *content* of the movie. For situations perceived as threatening, PWS have programmed

themselves to experience a state of fear or anxiety. In non-threatening situations they are happy to interact with the other person and able to focus on their individual or joint objectives. For example, one of my clients told me, “When I am by myself, I can’t even make myself stutter; but as soon as I walk out that door and speak to anyone, I almost always block and stutter.” Another said, “When I speak to someone that I know and feel safe with, I do not stutter. When I speak to someone whom I do not know I feel unsafe and I always block and stutter.”

Obviously, during those times of fluency, the object of their attention is quite different from what they are paying attention to when they block and stutter. Therefore it is important to ask the PWS: “Where are your thoughts directed when you are blocking; where are they directed when you are fluent?” You are eliciting what they have in focus, what is in the *foreground* of their attention.

People tend to block when they focus exclusively on themselves and their present experience of fear and anxiety. Instead of attending to the other person with whom they are communicating and the content of what they are saying, they focus on their fear of stuttering, and that fear grabs their total attention; they cut off from the other person and the communication ceases. Their emotional states come into the foreground – and no one’s needs are met because these people are unable to communicate effectively.

A PWS may say, “Now wait a minute Bob. It is not *myself* that I am focusing on; I am focusing on the other person and how they will judge my speech.” However, that judgment is actually theirs. They are hallucinating what the other person is thinking about them, imagining being judged by that other person. It is as if the PWS is observing what is happening from an observer position (see below): monitoring their own *performance* rather than holding in mind the *purpose* of the communication, and this kind of detached awareness interferes with their functioning.

On the other hand, when speaking fluently, the person is focusing on their outcomes for the conversation, what they want to happen. They are not even bothering to think about any imagined judgments; any fear of blocking and stuttering is irrelevant. Think of a time when you were busily engaged in doing something you love

– a hobby or sport, for example. You are so intent on what you are doing, giving it your all, concentrating on achieving perfection, that if someone asks “Are you happy?” you have to detach yourself and think about it. You are happy, but you only realise this after you stop to consider. In the same way, when you are fluent, you are not thinking about fluency, because you are busy getting on with living and communicating. You only have time for the fears when you stop interacting.

In mind-reading what the other person is thinking, the PWS creates a story which inevitably leads to an unhappy ending: their status is lowered in the eyes of the other person, they think they are inadequate, to be pitied, and so on. This story dominates their thinking. The story then feeds back on itself – no facts or evidence from the outside are required! – and the fears and anxieties multiply to the extent that the only object of attention is the fear itself. That then becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy: the muscles oblige, the blocking occurs, the person stutters. If however the PWS focuses on an external outcome, such as getting the other person to do something, their muscles will adjust to help them achieve that.

The reason I ask clients to practice going in and out of the states of fluency and blocking is to teach the PWS behavioral flexibility. They are already familiar with each state; what they need is the facility for changing their states. No one lives their entire life blocking. Therefore they need to identify the strategy they already use to do this, streamline it, and practice it so that they can get out of the blocking state into another state whenever they want. It is simple, yet profound. Therefore, you need to help them find out exactly how they do this. Ask, “How do you do that?” “How does your focus change?” “How do you talk to yourself differently?” “How do you give yourself permission to be fluent?” Take note of the answers as they will provide you with information you can use in assisting them to alter their states at will. The more they practice moving from one state to another, the better they will be at reducing the power of the old blocking strategy. They are training their mind to choose which state they want to be in.

"I would encourage anyone who stutters to rush to buy this book because it works! Bob Bodenhamer's approach gets to the root of what drives people's stuttering and offers a great collection of tools and ideas from NLP and elsewhere for finding fluency. It's simply the best answer to stuttering around today."

JUDY APPS, VOICE COACH, TRAINER AND SPEAKER, AUTHOR OF VOICE OF INFLUENCE

Stuttering has been in the shadows of public awareness for years. Sure, no one dies from stuttering, and it is not pervasive – only one percent of people stutter. Yet it is a malady that has not received a great deal of attention until recently. *The King's Speech*, a British historical drama, made stuttering part of the public conversation. Moviegoers learned of the embarrassing pain that most "People Who Stutter" (PWS) suffer.

The movie is about the young man who became the King of England just prior to the Second World War, revealing the painful experiences that stuttering created for him. The speech trainer in the movie, brings into focus this shocking fact: stuttering is not about speech! It is about the "thinking" that is mostly unconscious and in "the back of the mind" of the PWS.

In this volume, the author details a completely new approach to treating this debilitating condition. It both explains the structure of stuttering and blocking and provides cognitive tools for gaining more fluency. From identifying the origins of stuttering, through teaching how to think differently to working with stress, the author provides a unique approach to achieving more fluency.

"This book is an excellent resource for speech pathologists in working with the emotional aspects of stuttering. Bob uses clear language and gives great examples that make complex principles easy to understand."

MARILEE L. FINI, M.A. CCC/SLP

"At long last, speech language therapists and those who stutter have tools to address the most overlooked component of stuttering-the habits of thought that drive the speech block. The neuro-semantic processes described in this book will help the PWS to build a framework for fluency that can lead to permanent change."

JOHN C. HARRISON, NATIONAL STUTTERING ASSOCIATION

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