

How to Create a Good Dose of Stuttering

L. Michael Hall, Ph.D.,
Dr. Bobby G. Bodenhamer

HOW TO CREATE A GOOD DOSE OF STUTTERING

In the field of Neuro-Semantics we recognize the cognitive-behavioral principle that every experience has a structure. The facets of our mind-body-emotion system come together as variables in a system. This has many ramifications.

For one thing, it says that we can *model the structure of experience*. After all, if we can identify the component elements, arrange those variables in a sequence, identify the feedback and feed forward loops of the system, we can replicate that experience. Modeling in this way lies at the heart of NLP/Neuro-Semantics.

This explains why we can replicate excellence in communication, relating, managing, leading, inventing, creativity, and thousands of other experiences. This focus on modeling also means that every behavior and experience is *a skill*. Though it may be painful, harmful, and destructive (like manic-depression, schizophrenia, etc.) it has a structure and by exploring such *experiences of pain* has a structure and strategy that makes it work.

Does it suggest anything else? Yes. It also suggests that by curiously wondering how something works we are able to thereby enter into that experience and be inside that matrix of frames. And it is in this way that we can develop many more choices about changing and transforming an experience.

Therefore to work with the mind-body-emotion system of human beings which we call the Neuro-Semantic System, we begin with that system and

watch how it works (See Figure 1). What follows here begins with state and then adds state upon state to create the experience that we call “stuttering.” In the field of stuttering, John Harrison (2002) has provided a basic systems model for six of the key variables or factors. He calls this system, “The Stuttering Hexagon.” The six factors that he has highlighted are: physiological responses, physical behaviors, emotions, perceptions, beliefs, and intentions. He has noted that in a *system* every element is influenced by the other elements, positively or negatively (vi). Harrison has also noted numerous other *systemic factors* about the stuttering hexagon:

- As a system, stuttering involves the entire person and is not just a speech problem.
-
- Once operating as a system, it has a life of its own (p. 3).
-
- As a system, the stuttering system will have default settings.
-
- “ A permanent change in your speech will happen only when you alter the various default settings around the Stuttering Hexagon.” (106)
- Change a critical factor in the system, and the entire system changes.
-
- “Stutter 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. When you block on purpose, *you* are in control. Find out how good it feels to be holding the strings. Sure, your heart may be pounding away. You may get all flushed. You may feel silly and stupid.” (34)

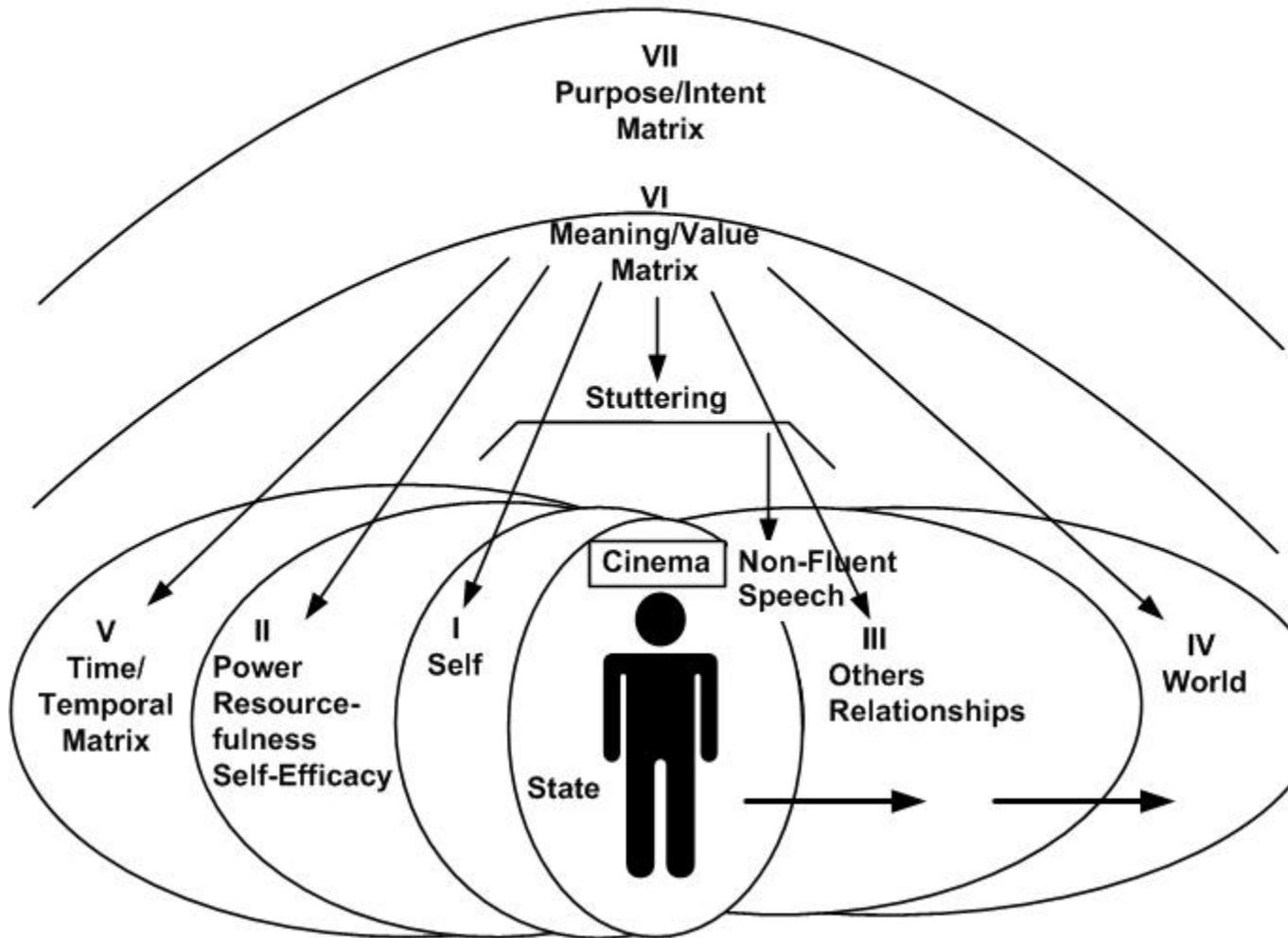
If there’s a *structure* to experiences, then we cannot just create a good batch of “stuttering” on the spot. It doesn’t work that way. Instead, we have to have the right ingredients and we have to mix them in the right order in order to create this skill. Not everybody can stutter. It’s a skill that necessitates a certain way of thinking and believing, a certain way of looking at and perceiving speech, self, others, etc. It involves a specific use of fear and apprehension, a certain attitude about how to cope and respond and it involves coaching and training the muscles and breathing. What we are calling an attitude, Harrison calls a mentality.

“*You* have to change to another mentality, the fight should be against the stuttering mentality that creates it, not the symptoms.

This means that there is a non-stuttering mentality just as there is a stuttering mentality. In what follows we have used the *7 Matrices of the Mind Model*, a Neuro-Semantic model developed in 2002, that structures the NLP and NS patterns. We use this model for coaching, counseling, modeling, and neuro-semantic profiling. Accordingly, we here use it to make explicit the stuttering system to provide systemic understanding of the semantics (meanings) that get into the body and nervous system (neuro-) to embody “stuttering” so that it becomes part of physiology and a style of moving through the world.

Figure 1

The 7 Matrices of our Neuro-Semantics for Stuttering



Meaning Table for Creating Stuttering:

#1 Meaning/Value – Meaning Determines the Matrices C 1. Classification of

blocking/stuttering
2. Associating blocking/stuttering with fear and shame
3. Evaluating blocking/stuttering as bad and unacceptable
4. Framing blocking/stuttering has having the following meanings in the other matrices:

#7 Intention/Self	#7 Intention/Power	#7 Intention/Time	#7 Intention/Others
-------------------	--------------------	-------------------	---------------------

(Attempted solutions that make the problem worse)

<p>I don't want to look like a fool?I will not show my vulnerabilities or weaknesses.</p> <p>I will play it safe and create a sense of security because I am not like others. I am more sensitive. I can't handle criticism well. I've got to stop this. This shows me to be inadequate and flawed. I will "block" myself from stuttering!</p>	<p>I am going to try to control this?I am going to try to control every word that comes out of my mouth.</p> <p>I need to change. I must not stutter. I have to catch this. I will do that by becoming very self aware of my speech. I have to try really hard not to block and stutter or I will look foolish.</p>	<p>I am going to not repeat the past.I am not going to make a fool of myself with my speech anymore.</p> <p>If I block any emotion in this moment, it will give me more control. I'm afraid this will be permanent so I will try hard to not to continue stuttering so I will "block" more.</p>	<p>I am not going to attract attention.I am not going to let others see my vulnerabilities.</p> <p>I will not give others to chance to laugh at me. I will not let them see me struggle. I will avoid any situations around people or groups that will expose this weakness. I will try to cover the stuttering up.</p>
--	---	---	---

#2 Self	#3 Power	#4 Time	#5 Others
<p>I am flawed. ("There is something wrong with me.")I am broken.</p> <p>I am not enough. I am inadequate. I am flawed.</p>	<p>Loss of controlFrustration</p> <p>Lack of Protection Perceived hurt. I need to change. I can't be enough. I am terrified of speaking to</p>	<p>PermanentDoomed</p> <p>It has always been this way. I am not making progress. I got to do something. I got to get it done.</p>	<p>It is not OK to stutter.Fear (of being rejected)</p> <p>Expectations from others Inability to measure up to expectations Hurt (not being</p>

<p>I am foolish. I am worthless. I am insecure. I am timid. I am shy. I am anxious. I am tense. I am “shamed.” I am “possessed.” I can’t be enough. Embarrassment I am ashamed. I am angry. I am abnormal. I can’t be enough. Self-pity My value is in my performance. Unique (I stutter – I am special.)</p>	<p>_____.</p> <p>I need to be respected and loved in order to speak fluently. (Other) I should be doing better. I got to do something. I got to get it done. “it” (becoming fluent) works for everybody but me. I cannot speak— In public On the phone On stage I cannot order in a restaurant. I cannot introduce myself. Hesitation is a sign of weakness. Hesitation is a sign of fear. Hesitation means you are not sure.</p>	<p>I can’t take my time to say what I want to say (sense of being rushed).</p>	<p>validated) Rejection Isolation Protection – (From getting involved in a relationship.) I am less than. I look foolish. Judged. People validate or determine my worth. What people say about me becomes the truth. People judge the content of what I am saying. I must protect myself from being hurt by others. I must conceal my emotions. I am doing something “bad” to them if I stutter.</p>
--	---	--	--

Note: In the above table we are illustrating how after the PWBS punctuates/classifies non-fluency as stuttering, the individual will associate *fear* and *shame* as to what stuttering might **mean**. The PWBS evaluates blocking/stuttering as *bad* and *unacceptable*. Obviously, the person does not want to block/stutter so an outcome (#7 **Intention**) of not stuttering becomes priority. The person fears what stuttering may mean and thus creates a driving urge to not stutter. Thus the person attempts to “block” stuttering because he/she has defined stuttering as being bad in each classification of his/her concept of **self**, of his/her relationship with **time**, of his/her relationship with **others** and how he/she views the **world** (Is the world safe, unsafe, friendly, not friendly, etc?). You will note that in the attempt to solve the problem of stuttering by attempting to block the stuttering, the person in fact creates blocking/stuttering.

We have included the matrix of frames from two actual case studies. Click here to access a graphic file of each case study depicting the frames matrix that activated the blocking/stuttering – ([Case Study #1](#)) ([Case Study #2](#)).

Another Visual – The Stuttering Iceberg [Click Here](#)

Read on—

Step 1: Call Stuttering Into Existence as a Reality.

First we have to punctuate the non-fluency of speech in which a person might be searching for a word or repeating a phrase or sound so that you stammer, hesitate and halt, and then try to stop or block oneself from hesitating, and then stutter. When this happens, we need to call this “stuttering” and do so with a certain disdain and contempt in our tone or attitude. By making this distinction, we thereby call into being such a “thing” as stuttering. We classify certain verbalizations as “stuttering” and so it comes to be. All we have to do then is to attach negative thoughts, feelings and attitudes to it and about it. Punctuating “stuttering” calls it into existence, gives it attention, enables you to pay attention to *it*, and become conscious of it.

Harrison (1989/ 2002) notes this very thing in his work:

“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.” (220)

Wendell Johnson (1946), as a general semanticist, noted the same thing in a chapter entitled, “The Indians have no word for it.” For there to be an experience of stuttering, we have to classify and categorize it and if we want the experience to be negative and painful, we have to add massive psychological pain to it: embarrassment, sense of inadequacy, flawed, etc.

We use our first and primary matrix to do this, the Meaning Matrix. We create meaning in several ways, one by classifying or punctuating an event in a certain way. The term “stuttering” calls it into existence. Without a term that identifies and classifies it in this way, it doesn’t exist. Then only non-fluency exists. Secondly, we create meaning by associating certain feelings to the classification. Then we frame the associated class and create higher level meanings.

Step 2: Contemptfully Fear Stuttering

What does it take to create a strong and lasting case of “stuttering” or blocking? Typically, we need a strong personality of a parent or teacher, someone who can raise their voice, yell, insult, punish, embarrass, or give hypnotic suggestions to set the meaning frame for “stuttering” as a bad thing. It doesn’t matter what semantic (meaning) frame is set so as long as you *feel fear* about the existence of this thing that you call “stuttering.” In this way you can develop a sense that to say words in a halting way is a negative, scary, and threatening thing. As the sense and feeling of fear grows, then you can attach that *fear* to more and more ideas thereby creating layers and layers of negative and fearful meanings.

What will you hear when you ask anybody who stutters in a state of self-consciousness?

Do you like stuttering? Do you enjoy it? Do you practice it? Do you feel skillful, masterful, or powerful when stuttering?

If they stay around to answer you, they will tell you that they do *not* like, enjoy, or want it. They will tell you that they hate it, reject it, feel embarrassed by it and try their best to stop it.

This highlights the fact that they have moved in their minds to a higher level meaning as they have take a thought-feeling state (in this case, “fear”) and applied it to the classification of stuttering. This frames the facets of stuttering in a way that makes these components seem dangerous and threatening. This seems natural. It seems intuitive. If the experience embarrasses and brings forth unpleasant social experiences, it’s easy to attach negative feelings and meanings to it.

This explains why it is so counter-intuitive to welcome it, embrace it, accept it, and practice it. Why make friends with “the enemy?” Why kiss the dragon? Yet, this is precisely what the so-called “paradoxical intervention” from Logotherapy and Brief Psychotherapy invites. And it is precisely what we do in Neuro-Semantics to straighten out the meta-muddle of setting the negative semantic frames in the first place.

Harrison recommends intentional stuttering:

“Here’s the irony, the harder you try to solve your stuttering problem, the more you’re establishing its presence.” (30)

“Just like fighting the gang reinforces its presence, focusing on the speech

block—resisting it, fighting it—only further entrenches it within your psyche.” (31)

Step 3: Become Afraid of what Stuttering Means

To create a good dose of stuttering, but we next have to buy into the negative meanings and move to yet a higher level as we add a good dose of fear about what the stuttering will *mean*. Expressing it in this way may seem weird. Yet we are a class of life that can become afraid of what something may *mean*.

In Neuro-Semantics, we see this all the time. We even elicit this structure in our trainings. I regularly ask, “Do any of you have a bad relationship to an idea? To criticism? Rejection? Discipline? Authority? Approval?” It’s amazing the things we can fear. We can fear concepts and ideas. We can fear what something could mean.

With shuttering, we give it such negative meanings and then feel threatened at the level (or within the matrix) of self, resourcefulness, relationship, and the world of career. Yet anything that creates a basic existential threat to some highly valued set of ideas or frames will put us in a fear state. What works best is to feel *fear* that it could, might, or does mean one of the following. Stuttering will now come to mean—

- In the *Self or Identity* Matrix: I am inferior, flawed, inadequate, bad.
- In the *Other or Relationship* Matrix: No one will like me. I’ll be rejected, disdained, alone, mocked, embarrassed.
- In the *World* Matrix of Life and Success: I won’t be able to succeed: my future success in business and relationships are endangered.
- In the *Power or Resourcefulness* Matrix: I will be out of control, disempowered, unable to handle things, unable to cope, etc.

At this level the system oscillates back and forth between *Fear* and *Meaning*. First the state of *fear*, then the state of *meaning*, then back to fear, etc. In this step, we use the Meaning Matrix and apply it to the foundational Matrices of Self, Power, Others, and World so that each of these become fearful. Each seems dangerous. Each seems dangerous because we map things as fearful now and in the future (the Time Matrix).

Step 4: Get the Fear Looping

Once our mind-body-emotion system classifies an event and then fears it,

we can then become afraid of ourselves and our entire experience. That is, we can move up yet another level and fear our fear. We can fear our entire neuro-semantic system.

As we then *fear* what the stuttering might or could mean, we fear our fear, we fear that it *does* mean personal inadequacy and more. After the looping back and forth between awareness of *personal inadequacy* and the state of *fear*, first one then the other, then the first again, your mind-body-emotion system oscillates in a closed-loop so that every time around the loop the fear becomes stronger and more intense.

This indicates a higher level move. The *fear* moves to a meta-level to become *about* the meanings. In this way, the fear becomes the frame and governs and self-organizes the fearful meanings. The meanings become fearful, dreadful, terrifying. The fear permeates into the meanings so that the very idea of the meanings set off “semantic reactions.”

Primary state “reactions” are those built in reactive patterns to triggers. Semantic reactions are higher level ideas, meanings, beliefs that similarly “rattles the nervous system” and what happens when someone “pushes our buttons.”

This explains why *fear* in one’s stuttering mind-body-emotion system can so easily spin out of control. It explains why it seems so real. *Inside* the body-mind system, it is. Then the fears multiply. In this, the Meaning Matrix uses fear of fear to begin looping round and round. As we attempt *to stop the stuttering and the fearing* this intention operates paradoxically to add fuel to the fear. This activates the Intention/ Purpose Matrix and actually makes it all worse.

Step 5: Outframe with even more fearful and dreadful frames

As the *fear* of stuttering becomes *fear* of what it means, the fear rises to a higher level. Later this turns into yet another higher level fear... fear as judgment, shaming, angering, guilt, etc. This operates to solidify the system and to close the feedback loops from the outside world where new information and data can enter. This outframe may take various forms.

This is the way it is.

This is all genetic and physiological and nothing can solve it.
Once a stutterer, always a stutterer.

It's no use going against the grain, might as well settle for being mediocre.

Step 6: Set Up a Closed Looped Contemptful Self-Consciousness

With all of the above in place, it will be easy to access the Self Matrix and bring a sense of painful self-awareness that you can then fear and attach dread and terror to. You will experience the painful self-awareness as self-consciousness that again believes that you are inadequate and flawed.

Step 7: Access the Time Matrix to Amplify the Painful Fear

Finally, recall any and every historical reference that confirms and validates this internal experience of shameful contemplate about stuttering ... bring it to this present moment to anticipate that it could happen at any moment, and project this into the future so that you anticipate it repeatedly over and over throughout all of the coming years. This will construct anticipatory fear of this whole matrix of fearful meanings in this moment and every step of every moment into the future.

The finale: A Fully Developed Stutterer

Set that system into motion and in the end you will create a human being who can semantically over-load speaking and verbalization. Speaking up suddenly isn't just saying words and transferring ideas via symbols, suddenly it is the litmus test for being adequate and non-flawed as a human being. Talk about putting your self-esteem or worth "on the line!" Talk about turning an everyday feature of life into a major event!

Yet the problem isn't the person, it's his or her frames about speaking. Such persons have been inducted into the Hall of Fears and Mega-Fears of Fears as they have learned and been trained to think of speaking in unresourceful ways. Most believe that "fluency is everything." Many people that "fluency would solve all their problems." Many think that mis-speaking is a big deal and that the only thing worse is looking foolish in front of others, being embarrassed, or being self-conscious. Others believe that making mistakes is terrible and that being criticized is horrible.

Yet it is *these ideas* as belief frames that actually create the problem. And they then lead to secondary problems: conditional self-esteem, lack of assertiveness, a style of playing it safe, trying to stop or block themselves when anticipating misspeaking, fearing strong feelings, thinking life is a performance, etc.

How To Create a Good Dose of Non-Stuttering

Are you ready for some “paradox?” Are you willing to hear and act on that which might seem counter-intuitive? It will seem counter-intuitive because if you stutter and hate it and/or even *identify* yourself as such, what follows is the mentality or set of frames that leads to a very different world, that of non-stuttering. Well, actually to stuttering and not noticing.

That’s how we do it. When we stutter (that’s *when*, not *if*), we just don’t pay much attention to it. Our attitude is that it doesn’t matter much. So what? It is in this why that we don’t over-load it with semantic meanings. Stammering, halting, or stuttering only means “I’m searching for my words” and nothing more. We don’t psycho-speak.

It’s like psycho-eating. Those who eat for psychological purposes and reasons— to feel loved, rewarded, fulfilled, valued, given the good life, to distress, to be social, etc.— eat for the wrong reasons. That’s why they of all people are the ones who seldom taste the food or enjoy it. They don’t eat food for food, for fuel, for energy and vitality. They psycho-eat. (See [Games Slim People Play](#), 2001).

Psycho-speaking has the same structure— *speaking* to prove that you are adequate, aren’t a fool, to avoid feeling embarrassed, to avoid feeling powerful, to avoid feeling angry, to avoid feeling ... Harrison notes that by over-valuing “fluency” as if it is some magical cure, we make *fluency* the golden key to all of the goodies of life. That’s the lie. I love what he wrote: “Ask your friends if their lives are terrific simply because they talk fluently. You might even ask them how comfortable they are when they speak in front of others. You’ll discover that fluency is no magic pill for anything except being fluent.” (v)

Step 1: Undo the classification. Stop punctuating speech in terms of stuttering or fluency. Let speech be speech and talk be just that, talk. Some is more effective than others. Some is more to the point, more succinct, and some is searching for words. No big deal.

Step 2: Welcome non-fluency and play with it. Spend five minutes stuttering on purpose. If you can turn it on, guess who’s in charge of your tongue? Practice with a friend and try to outdo each other. Turn it into a game. Attach fun and joyful and playful and social feelings to it. Harrison recommends doing this with an entire audience!

Step 3: Create a solid semantic basis for your sense of self, resourcefulness, relationship skills, and ability to take effective action in the world. This undoes the damage previously described. Unconditionally esteem your self as a human being whose worth and dignity is a given. You are a somebody, now live your life expressing that. Develop new and powerful resources to increase your sense of power and vitality. We have many empowerment processes in Neuro-Semantics just for that. Recognize that connection is with others is based more on thoughtfulness, consideration, sharing of values and visions, love, compassion, and a thousand other things than fluency. So is effectiveness in the world.

Step 4: Welcome in every negative emotion, make friends with it, and embrace it. Turn any negative emotion against yourself and you have not only missed the whole point of having “emotions” but you have created the foundation of a dragon state. (See [Dragon Slaying](#), 1995/ 2000). Get comfortable with discomfort. Stretch yourself. Get out of your comfort zone. Enjoy embarrassment.

The 7 Matrices of the Mind

In this presentation, we have run one possible scenario through the Neuro-Semantic model of *the 7 Mind Matrices*. We believe it is the most common one that mostly prevails, yet it is not the only one. Upon punctuating the existence of “stuttering,” one could just as easily *hate* it and develop strong antagonistic feelings of *intolerance* for any flaw in speaking. These responses would create meanings and feelings that would generate similar conclusions as described above, but with a different *feel*. The person would not so much *fear* the experience as feel *contempt* for it. Similarly, anger, shame, guilt, and numerous other negative feelings could drive the mind-body-emotion matrix system and create other *affects*.

Summary

If you stutter with a self-consciousness that you find painful, fearful, shameful, or intolerant, *there is hope*. There is hope because your experience has structure. That you have gotten certain ideas incorporated or embodied into your very neurology and physiology does not mean it is not psychological. It only says that it has a lot of habit strength and that it now operates apart from your conscious awareness. Structure means that we can intervene at numerous places in the system, sometimes reversing

the structure and sometimes messing it up.

In Neuro-Semantics we are currently using various meta-stating processes for resolving the stuttering matrix. These include such patterns as the Drop-Down Though, Phobia Cure, Self-Celebrating, Power Zone Ownership, Dragon Slaying, Intentional Stance, Glorious Fallibility, etc. We do all of these patterns in our *Personal Genius* training (Introduction to *Meta-States*) and recommend that training for this purpose.

Endnote

A full description of the 7 Mind Matrix model will be presented in the Neuro-Semantics Coaching materials, due Sept. 2002.

References:

Harrison, John C. (1989/ 2002). *How to Conquer Your Fears of Speaking Before People: A complete public speaking program plus a new way to look at stuttering*. Anaheim Hills, CA:

Hall, L. Michael. (1995/2000). *Dragon Slaying: From Dragons to Princes*. Grand Jct. CO: Neuro-Semantics Publications.

Hall, L. Michael. (2001). *Games Slim People Play*. Grand Jct. CO: Neuro-Semantics Publ.

Hall, L. Michael; Bodenhamer, Bob. (2001). *Games for Mastering Fear*. Grand Jct. CO: Neuro-Semantics Publ.

Authors:

L. Michael Hall, Ph.D. is a psychologist licensed as a LPC in the state of Colorado, trained in the Cognitive-Behavioral model, developer of the Meta-States model, prolific author, entrepreneur, and international trainer.

Bobby G. Bodenhamer, D.Min. is an international trainer in Neuro-Semantics and NLP, author of numerous books, ordained minister, and director of the First Institute of NS in Gastonia NC.