

Life in the Business School (How Self-therapy and Neuro-Semantics Changed my Life)

By Kau Valluri

LIFE IN THE BUSINESS SCHOOL

Hello there! My name is 'Kau' (sounds like 'Cow') and I am a recovering PWBS. I will be sharing with you my journey to achieve fluency through a series of articles, the first of which I am publishing right now. I'd like to thank Bobby Bodenhamer for providing me a platform to share my experiences.

I am writing these articles for two reasons. One, I can learn more about myself and see how my view of stuttering/blocking changes with time. Two, I hope my stories will help other PWBS understand that they are not alone in their fight for fluency and give them a message of courage and inspiration. Please note that the published article is fourth in the sequence and the other articles will follow soon.

- 1) **High School and College** – How Wallowing in Fear and Anxiety had me Running Helter-Skelter
- 2) **Graduate School** – How Speech Therapy improved my Outlook in life
- 3) **Work Environment** – How lack of self-confidence almost killed my Aspirations
- 4) **Admission to Business Schools – How my “It Does not Matter How I Speak” Attitude changed my approach to interviewing**
- 5) **Life in the Business School** – How Self-therapy and Neuro-Semantics changed my Life.

It was Summer of 2004 in Austin, TX. I had been working at a semiconductor firm for over four years and I was frustrated. Frustrated, not with my job, but with myself. I was a successful professional with an active social life, but I was having trouble finding the *sweet spot* in my life. I was not content. I was smart, diligent and optimistic, but I felt that I could not get what I wanted. I attributed all my failures to dysfluencies⁽¹⁾ in my speech and I felt miserable in most speaking situations. I was at a loss of power. I felt inadequate.

I was helpless.

I knew I had to take a long road to fluency, and I was hopeful. I was full of hope that I will see light at the end of the tunnel. I trudged on. Working as

an engineer in the semiconductor industry is not easy, especially if you are a PWBS. The first few months on the job, my anxiety and fear took control of me. I kept to myself. I held back. As a result, I was viewed by my peers as 'the quiet one'.

As I got more comfortable around people at work, I started opening up. I had been closet stutterer for most part of my life and I was superb at substituting words. I was fluent with co-workers (and friends) 80% of the time. The rest of the time, I actively substituted. I was proud of my ability to substitute, but only later did I realize how detrimental this was to my fluency.

After working in this environment for over five years, I knew my ambitions lay elsewhere. I wanted to do something different; something that no-one had ever done before. I was very interested in exploring ways to harness the power of technology for the welfare of farmers in developing countries. But being a PWBS, I feared I may not find success outside the *comfort zone* of my work. I was completely torn between my passion (to make a difference in developing countries) and my lack of confidence (because of blocking/stuttering).

At that time, it so happened that I was reading a lot of inspirational books written by business leaders. One of these happened to be 'Straight from the Gut' by Jack Welch. In this book, Jack mentions that he was a PWBS in his childhood and how he did not let that behavior affect his life. That clicked with me⁽²⁾. I clearly saw how the lack of confidence in my speech **relegated (!)** me to positions that I was not happy with! Stuttering affected my life and I wanted to break this mold! I wanted to define my career and not let anyone or anything define it for me!

I had two options:

- 1) Stay in the rut and continue wallowing in my comfort zone
- 2) Face new challenges and be more satisfied

I knew if I break away from my 'comfort zone', life would be very challenging. But, then I thought, god has given me only one life and I had to make best use of it! So, I decided to go 'straight with my gut feel' :), however painful the process may be.

If I had to impact developing countries, I believed that I needed a sound

business education. So, I gathered whatever little courage I had and applied to the top ten business schools in the U.S. With a lot of hard work, perseverance, support (from family and friends) and last but not the least, LUCK, I was invited to interview at 9 of the 10 schools. I was ecstatic! With ecstasy came anxiety!

Being a PWBS, it is hardly anybody's guess what the one thing is that I was anxious about!...INTERVIEWING! I dreaded it.

My first interview was with Wharton School. I knew if I performed 'decently' in the interview, I will get an admission. So, I prepared day and night for the interview. I was ready for the standard 3 'Why' questions:

- 1) Why MBA?
- 2) Why Wharton?
- 3) Why now?

Easy questions, right? Yes, if I'm practicing by myself and No, if I am being evaluated by an interviewer! I bombed the interview so bad I did not want to show my face to anyone else in the world! I remember to this day, I was not able to say even one word without blocking/stuttering. Yes, not even one SINGLE word!

I knew one of my dreams was dashed, but good for me, I had eight more!


The kind of guy that I am, I do not take no for an answer. So, I continued with my interviewing 'nightmare'. Next was Yale. This was equally bad. Next, a phone interview with Cornell. Horrible! Kellogg- Bad. MIT- Horrible, Horrible! I saw my dreams crash one after another.

But, I persisted. In my eyes, there was no other alternative other than to accept blow after blow until I succeeded.

The next few months saw me interview with other schools and I soon realized that I was 'hardening' with each passing interview.

My final interview with Columbia on Apr 12th 2005 was flawless!!! I went into the interview with a "It does not matter how I speak anymore" attitude and at the end of the interview, the interviewer said she was so impressed by me that she'd put in a special recommendation for me! Boy, my

interviewing nightmare turned out into an adventure after all! Although I was not very happy with the process, I was happy that I took the initiative to play.

The upshot was that I was admitted to five of the top ten business schools in the U.S.! I accepted a position at the University of Chicago in May 2005 and have been in Chicago ever since.

So, what did I learn from this rich and rewarding experience?

I learned that:

- 1) Whatever the internal dialogue (chatter) in my mind, I have to pursue my dream and not let petty things like blocking/stuttering define my life. I will succeed if I look beyond these behaviors.
- 2) Being candid during the entire application process (that I am a PWBS) has done me more good than harm. I realized that hiding it is not a healthy idea after all!
- 3) Even though some people may have put me down because I am a PWBS, only I know what I am really capable of doing. As long as I believe in myself, that's all that matters.
- 4) Changing perception about blocking/stuttering helps gain fluency. Going from an attitude of "*Ohmigod, this is the most important interview, I should not stutter*" to "*It does not matter how I speak anymore*" brought diametrically opposite results!
- 5) A better part of my speech depends on my breathing technique (*prana*). Meditation helps calm the mind.
- 6) Reading inspirational books and tapes motivate me and make me *t.h.i.n.k!*
- 7) I am more than the stuttering/blocking behaviors.

Notes:

- (1) I had been a PWBS for nearly 15 years before I took up my job and had received conventional speech therapy at the UT speech lab.
- (2) In March 2005, I had the opportunity of meeting with Jack Welch at a book signing at Ann Arbor. When I asked him how he overcame the stuttering, he said "My mom used to tell me that I stutter because I think faster than I can speak and my mouth could not

catch up with the mind. She told me not to think about it. So, I never cared about my speech and I did not let it bother me. Soon after, it just went away.