

*MAKE ROOM
FOR
THE STUTTERING*

By Pam Mertz

INTRODUCTION

Pamela A. Mertz (PAM) is the creator of the highly popular blog post: “Make Room for the Stuttering” as well as the podcast “Women Who Stutter: Our Stories.” She is a member of the National Stuttering Association, a Toastmaster and recently earned her “DTM” (Distinguished Toastmaster). She was a covert stammerer for many years and was afraid for anyone to know she stammered.

One day she realized she had a story to tell.

In Pam’s words:

“Life circumstances and maturity have helped me realize that I wasted a lot of time, and that I much prefer the authentic me.

My defining moment was getting fired from a job that I loved and had held for more than 20 years, because I had stammered publicly.

In that instant, I decided I could not live in hiding anymore and out of the closet I came. They say that difficult experiences can break you or transform you. I have been transformed. I have also discovered that I love to write and do it rather well.

I am telling stories of me in these blog posts. I am growing and evolving as a person, and really like what has been happening to me. Stuttering has value, and its important for me to share this with the world. Someone

told me that stuttering has no positive socially redeeming value. Well, I am here to tell you that is ABSOLUTELY not true.

Since opening up about my stuttering, my world has opened up, profoundly and deeply. I feel it is my responsibility to share my journey with others whose lives have been touched by stuttering.

I have made room in my life for stuttering and I have a relationship with it. Let's share these experiences."

A Stutterer's Fears

Fear of rejection
Fear of being hurt
Fear of being laughed at
Fear of blocking
Fear of embarrassment
Fear of having to stand up for self
Fear of being misunderstood
Fear of being disrespected
Fear of being dismissed
Fear of not keeping up
Fear of tensing up
Fear of being mocked
Fear of the world
Fear of not fitting in
Fear of talking
Fear of being silent

Fear of myself

By Pam Mertz

Dear Stuttering:

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [February 19, 2009](#)

I wrote this letter on March 15, 2008

It seems odd to be addressing you when I spent most of my life trying to deny you even exist. And that's the key, trying to deny you, because you have always been there. You couldn't be denied, could you? You always turned up, at the most inopportune times. Every time I thought it was safe, and I had the world fooled, you would come storming in, like a tornado, blowing up my spot, making sure your presence was known.

You made me so angry when you did that. I wanted to fit in with everyone else, and you made it your business to make sure I didn't. I was different. Everyone knew it. You made sure the only way I could keep you at bay was to stay quiet. So that's what I did –at school, at home, in college, at work. I did what I needed to do to protect myself. I didn't want to be made fun of, and you didn't do anything to help me when the kids did. It became easier and easier for me to hide you.

But funny thing, not only was I angry, I was sad too. Did you know that? I always had so much I wanted to say, but you wouldn't let me. You made me feel as if I wasn't worthy, as if I didn't deserve to speak up, that no one would want to hear what I had to say.

I bet you didn't realize you had such power, huh? Yeah, you held that amazing power over me, for a very long time. Because of you, I had a hard time making friends and hardly ever went out anywhere. I felt alone most of the time, especially with all of the other stuff going on at home. I think you were very tied up in some of that stuff too; you seemed to show up more when things were really bad.

Stuttering, it was because of you that I really started taking things too seriously. I figured if I couldn't speak well, I would have to be perfect at other things in order to be noticed. I wanted people to notice me, to say "Wow", but it never happened when I was a kid. That was your fault. So as an adult, I started trying harder and harder at everything I did, always trying to find that elusive happiness, always striving to do just that much better than the next guy, but it didn't work. Trying to be a perfectionist was hard work. The more I denied you, the more you were just there, screaming at me that you would not be denied.

You began to toy with my insides more as an adult, as if always whispering to me, "Hah", I still control you, what are you going to do now? You were no longer just making me angry and sad, you were making me depressed, and sick and tired of living a lie. I wanted to be true to myself.

You actually started helping me, finally, before the real rock bottom moment, and I suppose I really should thank you, for making me so damn uncomfortable that I had to do something or my

insides would bust. You weren't staying hidden anymore, and I had to make a choice. I think I made the right one.

Don't get me wrong – some days I wish we had never met, but most of the time, I think we're doing a pretty good job co-existing. I know you're here, and I don't fight with you so much. I let you have your say, right? You're kind of giving me a different sort of power, and that's pretty amazing.

I now have the Power of Me, and I am in control.

I never thought I would say this, Stuttering, but there's room for both of us. Just try not to be so blustery, ok? We don't have to be the tornado in the room anymore.

We can just Be!

On Change By Pamela Mertz February 19, 2009

It is what it is.

I have said these five words to myself many times, both silently and out loud. “It Is What It Is.” Sometimes, I have said it out loud just to hear how it sounds. Sometimes, I have said it aloud to someone else, thinking I was reassuring or comforting them. I have said it to remind myself that, try as I might, I cannot control everything. Some things are out of my control, and I have to recognize that and just let it go. It is not healthy to hold on to things not in my control. Sort of like the serenity prayer. It’s important to know the difference. I am certainly guilty of holding on too long.

Letting go is a process – it takes time. Just like change takes time – and is also a process.

Funny thing about change – it doesn’t just happen to one person. The other person is affected as well, even if it’s only a byproduct. And when one person grows and changes and the other doesn’t, another change happens. The relationship itself changes, and not always for the better. Thus, my use of the expression “it is what it is”.

When I kept my stuttering hidden for so long, I “was” a certain way. I fell into a pattern, holding on to habits, some of them bad. I didn’t realize it at the time. Some of those habits protected me, or so I thought. People got used to quiet Pam, who avoided certain situations, deferring to others to make choices for me. I was almost invisible sometimes.

But as circumstances in my life changed, I was confronted with an inevitable choice. Stay the same and stay stuck, or venture out of my little box, take risks and see what life had to offer. I chose to see what life offered when I was in charge. I began to make decisions that were good for Pam, without feeling guilt. (Well, in most areas anyway- I have many thoughts to share on guilt as well).

I began to trust that it was in my best interest to engage with the world, offer my gifts and have some control over my evolution as a person. I discovered I had always let life just happen and then found myself picking up the pieces when things went bad. I never put myself first. It was more fulfilling to be part of a world that I was contributing to. I had more control, and felt ownership over both the good and bad. I was becoming strong, confident, and on my way.

But as I grew and changed, it became noticeable that my partner was not at all rejoicing. Rather, it appeared he resented this “new me”. He started criticizing my involvement in new activities, and would say negative things when I talked about my involvement in those things and how excited I was to be experiencing this stuff for the first time.

He asked me to stay home and skip things I wanted to do, and would try to guilt me. When I tried to tell him how I felt, he told me he didn't want to hear it, made it seem like my feelings weren't important. He clearly did not like the idea of "Pam putting Pam first". I could tell. He yelled a lot, or gave me the silent treatment. Tension became more commonplace, as change happened. Trouble was, I was relishing the change, feeling it warmly envelope me. I recognized that it was a needed change, a change for the better. My betterment.

It seemed like each step I took forward, he was trying to pull me back. I tried to reassure him that change and growth is part of life. I wasn't leaving him behind, but invited him to come forward with me. He doesn't want to go. He wants things to stay the same. He has made this clear in his words and actions. He has always had a need to be in control and in charge. And I have decided that I don't want to live like that anymore.

I am no longer in hiding, afraid to show my true self to the world. He can't control me the way he used to, the way I allowed him to. I am making choices now. That is a big change for him, for both of us, for our relationship. Our relationship is not the same as it was when I was afraid to show my emotions and stuttering. It has changed. I have changed. I have evolved. We have decisions to make – I have decisions to make. We may not agree on the decisions that are ultimately made. We will face even more change. This much I know is true: change doesn't only happen to one person.

Perfectionism

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [February 27, 2009](#)

Have you ever thought you were a failure? Do you ever compare yourself to the lofty standards that society seems to adhere to?

It's all around us, this incredible drive to be the best, look the best, have lots of money, drive a nice car, send our kids to the best schools, and excel at work. We know it's hard for young people to fit in, to not cave to the demands of peer pressure. What about adults? Do adults feel the same pressures? And what happens when you spend your time striving for perfection?

When I was little, my father demanded perfection from his kids. Being the oldest of six, I always felt that pressure to succeed, excel, to take care of things, to be the perfect little adult. But I wasn't perfect, and I wasn't an adult was a kid who stuttered, and that embarrassed my father. He too was driven to seek perfection. He didn't tolerate flaws, just like his own father had not. He was one of 13 children, and he competed for attention in his family. In his eyes, having a big family, a big house, the biggest swimming pool on the block, complete with this amazing lighted lawn display, meant that he had made it. But maintaining all of that took a lot of work, and meant that we kids were often left to fend for ourselves, and figure out where we fit into that kind of world.

I was taught to make my feelings invisible, to be as self-sufficient as possible, and not to present any problems. I didn't live up to the trophy standards that my father seemed to feel were most important. When I stuttered, he would yell at me, tell me to be quiet, not say anything unless I could say it right. So I always had this feeling that there was something wrong with whom I really was.

Having been invisible, with regard to feelings especially, has made it a struggle for me to be Real and Authentic as an adult. Sometimes it looks like I "walk the walk", but that is not without the inner battle that often ensues. Quite honestly, I sometimes wish I did not stutter, and that I consistently had the smooth, fluent speech that I have a lot of the time. I think being real and authentic means to be able to admit this. I accept that I stutter, but still wish there were times when I could turn it off, or at least be able to look into a crystal ball and know when it is going to make an appearance.

In our professional lives, oral communication is often taken for granted. When one feels that we don't "measure up", even knowing deep inside that this is not the most important thing, you can be left with feelings of doubt and contempt. Feelings of shame and guilt are also common when you think you have fallen short.

I am closer than I have ever been to being ok with acknowledging these feelings. It means that I am not perfect. It means that I, we, all have painful feelings from time to time. It is ownership of those feelings, coupled with presenting yourself to the world, “As Is”, which makes us capable of being authentic in a world that pins so much on being perfect.

Being invisible as a kid played a role in how I turned out as an adult. It was a survival tactic. It made me strong. I now recognize that those feelings I hid for so long would eventually need to swim to the surface. Knowing how to swim and stay afloat is also a survival tactic. It allows me to be vulnerable and authentic, and claim my place.

[Making Room for the Stuttering](#)

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [February 16, 2009](#)

Sometimes when you least expect it, someone will say something about your stuttering that has a real impact. And it can have the most impact when it comes from someone who doesn't stutter.

I had a conversation with a very good friend, someone with whom I feel very comfortable sharing the "real me" and don't hold anything back. We were talking about communication and I was sharing with him about a big presentation that I have coming up.

He asked me if I set "being fluent" as one of my goals when I speak. I told him. "No, I set out to communicate effectively." He went on to say that he really respects the fact that I speak openly with him, and stutter comfortably with him, with no shame.

That really struck me, that one, I do that, and two, that he felt comfortable enough with me to say that. But then he said something that really made an impact. He said, "You make room for the stuttering". I asked him what he meant, and he went on to say that when I speak, "your stuttering is framed by so much else more, that your whole package is smooth and easy. I don't hear you stutter, although its there—what I hear is your message".

I felt so good after that discussion, and proud that we are comfortable enough with each other that we can honestly discuss stuff like this. I asked my friend another question: "What does my stuttering sound like to you?" And he responded that he doesn't know—he can't really answer that, as he hears me, not my stuttering.

This conversation between friends really spoke to me. Its not about being fluent, its not about stuttering, its about being a good communicator and being honest with yourself and the people you care about. Its about the "A" word. Being authentic with who you are allows for the authentic relationships with others in your life.

On Fitting In

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [March 4, 2009](#)

I have done some reading and reflecting on acceptance, which is ultimately what we all want and strive for. A recent post by another blogger talks about the difference between accepting ourselves – stuttering and all – and being accepted for who we are – stuttering and all.

That has been one of my biggest struggles -truly accepting all of me. I have never truly felt I fit anywhere. I have always found myself trying to re-make myself into the image I thought others wanted me to be. First it was my father. He saw me as flawed and was embarrassed by me. Not just the stuttering, but other things. I was sensitive, shy and awkward. I was self-conscious about the stuttering, and because it was not talked about, I felt very alone.

I remember wanting what the things other kids had, so I could fit in. Not unlike most kids. But I didn't want to just "fit in", I wanted to blend in, so I wouldn't stick out. It was not to be. With six kids, my mom had no interest in keeping up with fashion, nor did she have the emotional strength or desire to be concerned if her kid was a social misfit. I horribly remember awful blue shoes and thrift store dungarees. And I was not blessed with good looks as a child, which really made everything worse. I tried and failed to blend in with the other kids.

In high school, I continued to try and make myself like the other girls. I saved every penny I had to buy monogrammed sweaters and the "it" pocketbook all the other girls had. But it didn't work. The "in crowd" never really accepted me. Neither did the other crowd. I was miserable and retreated into books and trying to keep things together at home as things fell apart there as well. I remember lying about my parents, and even who I was sometimes, in an effort to create an image of myself that I thought others would like. I fantasized about being born into the wrong person , and that I was really smart, pretty, social and could talk beautifully.

It was hard work pretending to be someone else. Around people at college, I tried to re-make myself into someone who partied, drank too much and hung out with a rough crowd. I hated it, but thought it was the way to fit in and make friends.

In the workplace, hiding my stuttering became a full time job. I tried to fit in with the fluent world, and was never comfortable. I never dared to reveal my true self, out of desperate fear that I would be rejected and abandoned. The one guy I really ever loved did not know that, as I was afraid to tell him, and afraid of being hurt. I played it safe, and fell into a relationship that never felt right, because I was afraid of being alone and hurt.

Fast forward, twenty years later. I still feel I haven't found the right fit for me. I am who I am. I write better than I talk, I get embarrassed easily, and sometimes I still try to pass myself off as a non-stutterer. I don't practice what I preach. I don't always walk the walk. I still struggle with

my demons. I come from a dysfunctional, abusive background, and to this day, I try to keep some of that buried. I am definitely on a journey and I don't know where I will quite end up . But I trust that I am on the right path. I am letting stuff out, and letting stuff in, that I never have before.

I used to be afraid of my stuttering, emotional self. I am finally trying to make friends with myself, and find my fit.

On Depth of Character

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [March 10, 2009](#)

Today I gave a speech to a room full of job developers. These are people who have the daunting task of finding or creating jobs for persons in need of some type of supports. The typical person who works with a job developer has some type of disability – be it cognitive, emotional, learning, or physical. I followed the guy from the department of labor who gave a rather dreary overview of labor market trends (maybe dreary is a strong word, but it was – what else could it be?)

My topic was to talk about resume writing, applications and interview skills, and offer some good news that with the proper tools, jobs can be found. Not the most exciting of topics, but I was going to share how to help people make winning first impressions. No matter what the job market looks like, that is always current.

There were more people there than I had expected- about 75. And I recognized several people in the audience. A couple came up to me before hand, and said they were so excited to see me on the agenda, that they had chosen this break-out session to attend rather than another one. Oh boy, no pressure to perform, huh?

Of course, I wanted to do well. I wanted to do much better than the guy who went first, whose graphs and charts were really well, you know how well graphs and charts go over!

I knew my material and felt comfortable. What was I worried about? Guess? I worried about how much I might stutter, and should I say a quick little something before I launched into the wonderful world of resumes.

Well, here's what I did. After being introduced, I said I wanted to start with two quick things. One, that I had no statistics or charts, and that the guy before me would be a hard act to follow. (There were some chuckles – good, I had broken the ice!) Then I said, I also want you to know that I stutter, and you might hear it during my talk. Don't get alarmed. I'm OK with it, and I hope you will be too. Then I took a breath, smiled, and started talking about resumes and marketing yourself.

I was fine. No one batted an eyelash. My stuttering did not interfere at all with my message.

As a matter of fact, someone came up to me after and said “That was a perfect introduction. You told us you stutter, and you looked relaxed and at ease, and so were we. That shows self confidence and your depth of character. Good for you. Good for us.”

Good for us when we can do that and get on with the issue at hand. Good for me. I felt great!

On Abandonment

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [March 22, 2009](#)

I have been thinking of the whole concept of abandonment a lot. I have experienced some in my life. I recently tried to talk about what that means for me, and my feelings connected to abandonment. I found it was easier to write it.

I have always been afraid that whenever I get close to someone and bare my soul with them they will leave, so I have been very guarded in my relationships.

I had the courage to share with J (mentor's name) that I was afraid he was going to abandon me. I have shared with him more than I have with anyone else, even myself. And I began to worry that he would slip out of my life. He assured me he still has space for me.

I felt abandoned by my father long ago. He was never there for me in the way I needed and wanted. Our estrangement lingers. After he survived a brain tumor, I thought some reconciliation was near, but it has not happened. I thought I was a terrible person for not being able to forgive him. I don't have to forgive. There are no rules when it comes to feelings.

I have felt abandoned by my partner. He does not know the real me, the thinking, feeling me. He wants me to be the submissive caregiver, the same role I played in my childhood home. I am fighting to free myself. When he tugs me backwards, and I fall for it, I feel abandoned.

I have also been abandoned by my mother. She was not there to protect me as a child. When she finally found sobriety, it was too late. I was gone.

And strangely, I felt abandoned to her recovery. As she freed herself from alcohol's grip, she plunged into her sobriety and new life, and I felt she made no room for me. She poured herself into helping other alcoholics. She attends meetings, sponsors other addicts, hosts conventions, runs groups, and drives all over to bring hope to those caught up in the alcohol fueled world.

Every time I try to talk with her about anything I consider important, she changes the subject. I respect that. Recovery has changed her life. But growing up in an alcoholic home changed my life too, and we have never really talked about it. She tells her story to strangers but not to me.

I have sometimes also felt abandoned when stuttering. When someone made fun of me, or looked away, or tried finishing my sentences for me, but didn't say what I was going to say. That made me feel that I wasn't being appreciated or heard for who I was. Abandoned by a world in too much of a hurry to listen.

I am certain my mother carries around a lot of guilt. That she has told me. My sister has told me that my mother has always felt guilty for not doing more for me about the stuttering. That she should have stood up to my father and insisted that I get speech therapy.

I hope that by acknowledging my feelings of abandonment I can finally put some of this to rest and find my balance.

[I Wish I Stuttered](#)

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [March 30, 2009](#)

I recently had a long conversation with one of my sisters, and among other things, we talked about stuttering. Now this is a rarity, because for many years, any mention of my stuttering was done in a cloak and dagger sort of way. Mysteriously whispered about, so my feelings would be spared.

My sister Kim and I sometimes have cautious discussions about stuttering. Cautious, because even though it is an “allowed topic” now, she will still tip-toe around it, to make sure I am really comfortable bringing it up. Once she’s sure though, whoosh, we’re talking about stuttering. It seems she always wanted to, even though no one else in the family ever wanted to talk about it. On the rare occasions it was mentioned, it was hush hush and a “we feel sorry for her” kind of thing. Kim says it would have been too awkward actually talking about stuttering, when the person stuttering seemed to pull it off a lot of the time that she didn’t stutter! (Say that three times fast!)

Kim told me that once she had been very angry with my mother’s husband Paul, when we were all gathered outside of a church the day of my sister Stacey’s wedding rehearsal. We all met in front of the church. When I got there, I said some sort of greeting to everyone, and Paul teasingly mimicked the way I said it. I remember it only vaguely. In those days, I didn’t say anything and kept the hurt to myself. Well, it seems Kim remembered it like it was yesterday.

Kim had overheard Paul’s remark, as did her son, Anthony. He had said to his mom, “why would Paul make fun of her like that? That’s terrible, and mean. He shouldn’t do that – she can’t help it.” (he was referring to my stuttering – wow – understanding as a kid). Kim told me she said something like she wanted to put Paul in his place, but didn’t, because she didn’t think I would want anyone calling any more attention to my stuttering.

I never knew that, until Kim shared it with me when we were just shooting the breeze and talking about stuff, and stuttering. That opened the door for us to talk about other stuttering related things. She told me there is a girl she works with who has a really severe stutter, and that some of the stroke patients she works with have sometimes stuttered. She told me she wished she could have asked me about stuttering and how it felt, so that she had a better sense of it when she meets others who stutter.

Having this conversation with my sister brought tears to my eyes. Just talking openly about it with a family member after so much silence was important, meaningful, had an impact. It has been one more step on my own acceptance journey, having a family member acknowledge that its OK and I’m OK.

We started talking about some of the doors that have opened up for me since I opened up about my stuttering and came out of the closet. I shared with Kim that I have loved traveling to conferences and talking and meeting with other people who stutter, and that stuttering has really

allowed me to see the world in a whole new light. She jokingly said, “Boy, I wish I stuttered too”. She has no idea how good that was to hear.

Stutter-eze

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [April 27, 2009](#)

In an earlier post, I referred to how I stutter sometimes as stutter-eze. It's what I mean when I am stuttering so comfortably, that its hardly noticeable to me or the listener.

Well, I spoke stutter-eze this morning with a colleague at work. We were working on a plan for student advisement, which we will have to present to the team on Wednesday. I stuttered on a few words, and she said something like how confident I look when I stutter. She then asked me if there were certain words I tend to stutter more on, or if I knew when I was going to stutter.

I told her how situational stuttering is, and how it shows up whenever it feels like it. I shared that there are certain sounds I have more trouble with – and described them as “class four” sounds, which meant nothing to her. So I further explained that words that begin with “t”, “d” “p” and a “hard c” often give way to stuttering.

I also shared that I almost always stutter in the middle of one particular word, communication. And as I said it, of course it came out like it always does, “communica-ca-ca-ca-tion”. She smiled and said she has to be mindful to make sure she doesn't stutter around me, because she finds herself doing that, and she doesn't want me to think she is making fun of me. I assured her I am OK with that.

Then she asked me if I ever do get made fun of. I told her “sure” and gave her the example of when I couldn't say American cheese at the deli, and the clerk told me I would have to buy chicken wings instead. She burst out laughing, and so did I. It was not funny to me at the time, but it sure was nice to share a laugh over a stuttering moment with someone who gets stutter-eze.

She then went on to say, “I hope you don't get offended, but I am going to share something biblical with you. God always picks the ones with a challenge to do the toughest work. It's amazing that with a speech difficulty, you are such a great public speaker.” Of course I was not offended.

It's fun to speak stutter-eze with someone who doesn't stutter, isn't it?

He Asked For My Autograph

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [May 15, 2009](#)

This past Tuesday ranks right up there in my list of top things I never thought I would do. But it also tops the list for being most special.

I had the opportunity, privilege, thrill to visit a middle school and talk to students as part of National Stuttering Awareness week. I had wanted to do this again, as I first had the idea in October and met with 330 kids in my school's district in October, for International Stuttering Awareness Day. That day went very well too, as the school embraced the whole theme. Because October is Disability Awareness Month, it fit nicely, and the school devoted a whole hallway to famous people who stutter and what stuttering is all about.

This day was even more special, because there were three kids in the school who stutter, one of whom has been getting teased and picked on by peers. My plan was to educate about stuttering, put it in the context of being a difference, and then work into teasing and bullying prevention. I met the kids who stutter before Tuesday's presentation, so they could meet me and know what to expect. One of them told me he gets picked on and teased by kids in his class. I wasn't sure if he/they would want to participate in the program.

I was wrong about that. They volunteered for everything. The one with the more severe stutter actually volunteered to do the "Coolest Stutter" in front of his whole class, which was a major risk for him, but he was beaming, especially when I gave him an award for doing it.

I told my personal story of stuttering to these kids, and I am not exaggerating by saying they sat in rapt attention. I had grabbed them immediately by stuttering openly right away. They had never heard an adult stutter while doing a talk. It was pretty cool.

We had reporters and photographers from two local newspapers. The kids in the school felt so special. Its awesome when we can spotlight kids and school for good things. And the principal was beyond awesome. She really embraced this and welcomed me with open arms. I met the superintendent, who also thought it was a wonderful thing to do. I don't think most of the staff had ever interacted with an adult who stutters openly.

So, there was a nice newspaper article written up about this, and a video clip made and posted to the newspaper's on-line site. The links are only good for two weeks, so won't link them here. What I will do is list some of the awesome questions some of the kids asked me throughout presentation, and my attempts at answering them honestly.

"Have you ever been made fun of by an adult?" I told them a few stories of when I've tripped over words while at a store and the clerk mimicked me.

“Is it worse to be copied or teased?” I said I don’t like either, but copied is hard. My face usually turns red.

“What do you say when someone teases you?” This was hard, because sometimes I am stunned or embarrassed, so I told the kids that, to be very honest. I added that one time I said to someone, “you don’t stutter as good as me.”

“Is it hard to stutter with your students at school?” I said sometimes, but I try to be honest, and let people know I am comfortable with it by my actions.

“Does Tiger Woods really stutter?” I said he did when he was a kid.

“You squeeze your eyes sometimes when you stutter. Does everyone who stutters do that?” This was really good question from a very observant young person. It caught me off guard. I said, no not everyone does that, I think I do that to try to push the sound out.

I did five 42 minute presentations to grades 5-8 at a middle school in my community. I made a difference, using my stuttering, something I was always so afraid of and embarrassed about. Now I am using my experience to help others, maybe just one, develop more tolerance and respect for differences. I feel I truly made a difference.

But wait – the best part. When I was packing up to leave, a kid came out in the hall and asked me for my autograph. I couldn’t believe it. I asked him, “are you serious?”. He said. “yes, Miss”. He had a piece of lined paper and a pencil. I signed and printed my name with a tear in my eye. He said, “thanks Miss, we are glad you came to our school.”

It was a good stuttering day!

Seize The Moment!

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [May 17, 2009](#)

When I was asked to be a judge at a youth public speaking contest, I didn't give it much thought. How hard could that be? It would be fun, and it was a worthy event. Kids under 16 were competing for scholarship money. It was a competition sponsored by an Optimist Club chapter, which is a civic organization that emphasizes service and working with youth. So I agreed to volunteer on a Saturday.

When I was asked to give the key address at that same event, I did have to ponder that. One of my Toastmaster colleagues heard me speak a couple of weeks ago, and he thought it would be inspirational to share my "stuttering story" and promote Toastmasters at this competition. There would be the young participants, their parents and family and club members. I did not know any of these people, and wondered how talking about stuttering while promoting Toastmasters would go over in a fluent crowd.

I decided to do it – it would be a good challenge for me, and would offer another opportunity to de-mystify stuttering.

I didn't prepare much, as I know "my story" well and have been a Toastmaster for 3 years, so I can enthusiastically talk up Toastmasters easily. I arrived at the hotel early Saturday morning, got my judge briefing and went to work. I was not going to be on until after all the kids had given their presentations. We wanted to have my spiel come before the winners were announced, so everybody would listen and no one would leave! Bribery always works, huh?!

I quickly became engrossed in the kids speeches. They were really amazing. These kids were good! Each had won at their club and zone levels (similar to Toastmaster contests), so these kids were prepared and polished. They ranged in age from 9-16. There were eight girls and five boys, separated into one division for girls and one for the boys. The winners would receive a \$1500 scholarship for college, a plaque, pride, yada yada.

Each young person had to speak for 4-5 minutes on the theme, "For Me, Optimism Is " They nailed it – each youngster talked about significant things in their lives – family illness, sacrifice, death – or world issues, and how to stay optimistic and positive in challenging times. It was so hard to judge one better than another, because they were all winners in my book.

Then it was my turn. I was nervous and actually thought, "how can I possibly follow these amazingly bright, fluent youngsters?"

Well, I began with "Don't Be Like Me" and wove that line throughout my 11 minute speech. (I went over – I always do. I Stutter!) My message to the audience: I wasted a lot of time hiding

and being ashamed of who I am because of stuttering. I didn't want anyone else to do that. Whatever our "thing" is, (because we all have a "thing" we wish we could wish away) we are all unique and talented beings that need to let our light shine. I told my stuttering story, how I let fear hold me back and how I knew I arrived at the place when I decided I didn't want to do that any more. Then I launched into talking about how Toastmasters helped me become even better at the person I was always meant to be, and that we all need to tell our story.

I had notes, but barely used them. I found I was speaking from my authentic place, from my heart, and twice felt like I was going to choke up. But I was in control and my voice was strong and clear, and my stuttering was very natural. When I was done, I felt a strange feeling. My heart was fluttery and I felt warm inside – I felt like I had done right by telling this version of my story.

The audience applauded. Then I saw everyone rise to their feet and give me a standing ovation. I was overwhelmed in that moment. I felt embraced by the whole room – honestly, I felt embraced and held and awash with peace. It was a stunning moment.

Then I quickly re-joined the other judges and we went about our business of judging. When we had reached a decision, the competition chairperson joked that maybe we didn't want to come in, that some parents attack the judges if their kid doesn't win. But he said that if we could stick around afterwards, the contestants and parents would really like Toastmaster feedback as to what their kids could work on for next time. I liked that: next time. Because win or not, each of these kids were going to have a whole lot of "next times" in their lives.

The winners were announced, photos were taken, and we Toastmasters were formally thanked. Then it was like a receiving line. Kids and parents came up to us, thanked us, and asked for feedback. My Toastmaster buddy said to me, "Pam, they're all going to want to talk to you. Your speech was amazing."

People didn't really want to talk to me – people came and hugged me. They said thanks for sharing. One woman had tears in her eyes and said. "Your story is my story. Our story. Don't be like me? We should all be like you!" I cried then.

What a special day. We definitely have to seize those moments. There is a reason for everything.

Has anyone ever had a similar moving experience? I swear, I still have Goosebumps, and still feel the warm embrace of that room.

Social Acceptance of Stuttering

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [May 19, 2009](#)

I think stuttering is still very misunderstood by most people, and it is up to those of us who stutter to tell the world about it and make it less awful. I do think some people think stuttering is awful.

That's why they get uncomfortable, look away, make dumb comments, etc. How will we change this mind-set if we don't do something? Some people who stutter are afraid to be too public with their stuttering. I was like that for a long time.

I worried about rejection. My stutter is mild a lot of the time, and seems OK for people to listen to, especially once they get used to me. But when I go on a rip and REALLY stutter, I notice people get more uncomfortable. That's usually my cue that I have to say something.

My own family has a hard time with my stuttering. It has to do with my being covert for so long – keeping it well hidden, keeping the taboo, well, taboo. As long as I kept stuttering and the other family secrets, secret, everything was good.

Now, that I'm am open and talking, and heaven forbid, getting some media coverage, I think some of my family is embarrassed. My sister Kim stopped over Saturday night. She doesn't have a computer, and wanted to see the video from last week. She watched it twice, and got teary-eyed. She said she was proud of me. I had to choke back my emotion. I asked her what was up with everyone else. She said my mother and two sisters "just aren't interested" and that I shouldn't even bother sending them stuff. They aren't going to respond. The silence is deafening. I hear the silence, and it weighs as heavily as my own silence did for years.

Am I embarrassing them? Is it socially unacceptable for them to have a sibling in the news stuttering openly? It makes me feel they don't care, or that I do embarrass them. I do care. That actually kind of hurts.

I guess I should be lucky my stuttering is not more severe. At least I talk to my mom and sister once in awhile. If I stuttered any more overtly, maybe I wouldn't talk to them at all.

Now back to the issue of stuttering being attractive. I talked with friend Bob last week, who tells me that he finds women's stuttering extremely attractive and almost sexy. I find that so intriguing, as another good friend – Richard – said my stuttering is attractive about two months ago. I was blown away with this, and now Bob says pretty much the same thing.

Bob shared that he can listen to women stutter all day. I wonder, do women feel the same way about men who stutter? I did find my friend James' speech pattern very soothing. Almost cute. It fits his personality. He stutters with repetitions and silent blocks, and I found myself really

wanting to listen. He made me want to hear more, and his stuttering seems to positively accentuate his choice of words.

Its funny how we can relate to family and non-family so differently. We are more socially accepted by our community than our family, at least in my case.

Thoughts? Comments? Similar experiences?

Percussion: A Stuttering Beat

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [June 11, 2009](#)

I didn't intend to write today, because I already have a post written for tomorrow and several good drafts started. But this, I couldn't resist.

Good friend and mentor J and I talked about stuttering last night, and he asked me a really surprising question. Well, two actually. What would happen if you paid attention to the aesthetic beauty of stuttering? What if you could learn to enjoy the sound and beat of your own stuttering?

Huh? Now you realize that it is only with really special people that you can have this kind of conversation. J does not stutter, but he has been around me long enough that it is perfectly OK for him to offer this kind of feedback. In fact, it's almost like he has a standing invitation.

He said my stuttering has a "cadence" to it – like a percussion drum. When he saw the look on my face, he said, "Really. I have been closing my eyes and listening closely to some of your stutters and you have a distinctive beat. Almost every time you say certain words, you stutter exactly three times and then the word breaks free. Like this, cah-cah-cah-communication, cah-cah-cah-college." He then started drumming on his knee to a beat and was stuttering like me. This doesn't happen every day.

This was very intriguing. He challenged me to listen to my stuttering and try to replicate it exactly, so that I could feel the beat. At first, it was hard to do. But I was game and tried it, much to his delight, and mine. I found he was right. When I say "stutter", like as if on cue, it comes out, "stu-stu-stu-stutter." Same with "people", it comes out "pa-pa-pa-people".

J challenged me to experiment with my stuttering and try to replicate natural stutters and see if I can pick up the beat. He then launched into music, how my stuttering almost could be like a rap song. He said he has noticed that some singers do seem to put some pseudo-stuttering into a song for emphasis or maybe just the beat.

We then talked about stuttering having beauty. I reminded him that someone had told me my stuttering was attractive not too long ago, and he just smiled and said "yeah, I remember!"

So while I am practicing my "stuttering beat", and smiling broadly as I write this, what do you think? Isn't it awesome that two people who care about each other can have this kind of special conversation? Can you dare to think of your stuttering like this? If by chance you are a SLP reading this, can you see any value having this discussion with someone who stutters?

I have thought about this all morning, and had to put it on paper. Maybe J and I will write a song about it and put it to music, featuring a percussion drum, of course!

[What If Stuttering Was The Norm?](#)

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [June 22, 2009](#)

My good friend posed this question about two weeks ago. I knew I would eventually write about it, just wasn't sure how I felt about this notion. We were talking about impatience and judgement, two things that people who stutter often face and fear. I know I have.

So, his premise is that if stuttering was the norm, then we would have much more patient listeners. People would slow down and focus, and use active listening skills, to be sure to understand stuttered speech. The stutterers would be revered, looked up to, duly respected. Listeners would hang on every word, for as long as it took for those words to come out.

Far fetched, maybe? But nonetheless intriguing. It makes perfect sense. People who stutter often give great presentations. The stutterer prepares more, speaks slower, allowing for listener process time, and makes effective use of pausing. Some stutterers also keenly understand the dynamics involved in good communication, which of course go way beyond fluency.

People who stutter use eye contact and body language to make a point and connect with the listeners. If you don't believe it, go and listen to a stutterer giving a speech. Or try giving a speech yourself. You will notice a cadence, and as you listen, you will pick up the words and content just fine. A stutterer will also repeat things, both intentionally and involuntarily! This is another great way for the listener to be sure they walk away with a clear understanding of what was said! Makes sense, huh! I know I got you at least thinking about it in a different way!

People who don't stutter may talk way too fast, choose sloppy words and may fail to connect with the audience. Watch for that sometimes too. You'll notice speakers trying to keep up with a tele-prompter, and forget that they should really be keeping up with the audience, those there for the purpose of listening.

I attended the annual conference about two years ago, for my state's speech and language association. I had been asked to give a brief overview of my stuttering and how I have been impacted by change. I remember one of the therapists in the audience shared a tale (tall?) about a Zulu tribe in Africa where stuttering is coveted. People in the tribe who stutter are considered to have great wisdom. Other tribal members bemoan the fact that they don't stutter, and strive to learn how to stutter.

Parents rejoice when children begin stuttering during language development, and breathe a sigh of relief when its not outgrown. The parents know their child will lead a blessed life, known for wisdom and powerful speech. Envy and prestige will follow this child through his life, as he or she is pre-destined to do great things as an adult who stutters.

Imagine that. A world free of judgement and impatience for stuttering. A world where stuttering is considered power and strength.

What if stuttering was the norm? How would it look to you? How would your outlook on life change? Can you imagine this?

[The Nowhere Place](#)

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [August 8, 2009](#)

A very special person and I recently discussed feelings about stuttering and what happens when we block. I really found this fascinating, because we don't always have the courage to ask someone how we sound when we stutter or what it actually feels like for that eternal second that seems to go on and on.

He told me that he enjoys listening to my stuttering, because it seems so effortless and shows no sign of tension. I find that to be such an oxymoron, because to me the whole act of stuttering IS tension. If one can speak without effort and tension, then the speech shouldn't be stuttered. I don't understand this, and certainly don't understand when someone offers me feedback that my stuttering is pleasant to listen to. Maybe it is!

My friend then asked how does he sound and look when he stutters. He shares that this is not a question he has asked often, but it is one you can ask a fellow stutterer. I honestly responded that I can indeed hear his stuttering, but it is OK, sounds fine and easy to listen to and that I do not see noticeable tension in his face. That is where he thinks it is most visible.

I wanted to know more, because I feel another person who stutters somewhat mirrors our own experience and allows the freedom to explore and ask these really probing questions. I wanted to know how it really feels when someone else gets caught in a block. Now, I can ask pretty direct questions. We have become close and respectful enough with each other to really be honest. I felt it was OK, that I wouldn't be too disarming.

My friend explained his block like this, "well, it's like I lose contact and go into this nowhere place." As he said this, I felt how he felt. I could picture the place. Getting lost, like it's a black hole that you visit, for that split second or few seconds, when you are no longer present and engaged in the conversation. I appreciated his candor so much.

And the amazing thing, we both agreed, is that the listener doesn't even know this is going on. You lose contact and feel helpless and alone and out of touch with the person you are talking to, and they don't even know. It's all internal, for those few brief seconds, maybe even milliseconds. **THEY DON'T EVEN KNOW THIS IS HAPPENING.** I thought about this for a long time. Your fellow traveler in the conversation doesn't even know you fell off the trail. Doesn't even know you feel lost and alone. People who don't stutter can't possibly get that.

I got it immediately. Felt it, like getting the wind knocked out of you and you are trying desperately to act as if nothing is wrong. I think this hit on the crux of the whole covert stuttering

thing. Both my friend and I had been covert. So when you're hiding your stuttering anyway, and then try to hide the fact that you fell off a cliff too mid-way through a conversation, and no one but you knows it's going on, whoa.

I could not have had this conversation with anyone else. A fluent person would have no idea how this feels. And this really was a perfect way to explain what that LOST feeling is really all about.

What do you think? Have you ever gone to the nowhere place? Can you describe it?

The Essence of Presence

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [September 17, 2009](#)

Presence is extremely important in our everyday lives. It is when we are with someone fully, paying attention only to them, listening patiently, allowing what ever needs to happen, to happen. It is rare to find people able to be present with someone else, especially in our multi-tasking worlds.

How many times have you been on the phone with someone and heard the tell tale tapping of the keyboard? Or been face-to-face with someone in an intense conversation and they answer their cell phone? Or in that same conversation and the listener has that blank look about them, like they have no idea what you just said?

To me, presence is special. It says that the other person is with you, respects you enough to put everything else aside and is connected to you. How do you know when someone is present? I can always tell.

My emotions have been seeping out more and more lately. Uncomfortable for me sometimes, so surely uncomfortable for the other person. Here's some examples.

Last week, I was talking with mentor J and hit on something painful. My tears started to flow. He did not say anything, just maintained eye contact and silently passed me a tissue. I could see his eyes getting moist too.

I was on the phone yesterday with a close friend and got caught in a pretty good stuttering block. She did not interrupt, attempt to finish my thought, or make any impatient sounds. She just stayed with me, for as long as it took. (And it seemed forever, although it was only seconds.)

I was out to dinner about a week ago with a close friend and we were recalling some of the moments that we have shared. She got teary and choked up. I said nothing, just leaned in a bit and smiled, and listened. Her tears subsided and she looked at me and smiled. We said nothing, but both understood that presence.

I know I need unconditional love and support. We all need that. It is one of our most basic of developmental needs. Unconditionally loving someone includes being present with them at those key moments. It also means sometimes just being silent in the moment, and letting us both absorb what presence really is. The essence of presence is just that – silently sharing those moments that matter the most.

What does being present mean to you? Can you recall the last time you were really present with someone? Or someone was present with you?

Stuttering in School

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [September 18, 2009](#)

Now here's something really profound. It is not always easy to stutter publicly. People's reactions are as unpredictable as my stuttering is.

I work in a high school, which is challenging enough. Add to the mix some stuttering and it feels like a roller coaster ride some days. Anyway, part of my job is to train all the students in the building on sexual harassment prevention. It's a big job for one person. There's about 500 students in the building, half there in the morning, the other half in the afternoon.

The only way one person can get this done is class by class, so a whole bunch of presentations. So I am talking to kids about negative sexual attention all day. And kids get giggly when we talk about this! Sometimes I have trouble with "s" words, which sex and sexual both begin with. And it would be stupid to try and substitute those words – it just wouldn't make any sense.

So I have muddled through this week, doing fairly well, managing the stuttering. But yesterday, I was having a stuttery day and "sexual" was not easy to say. Some kids were giggling as I stuttered on the word. It was coming out "se-se-se-se-sex-u-u-ual".

One kid shouted, "don't worry miss, no need to get nervous about saying sex. We know even older people have it."

Whoa, even I had to laugh at that one! The whole class did. We were laughing together, and it was OK.

Thanks for Finishing My Words

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [September 21, 2009](#)

How many of us who stutter really hate when a non-stutterer finishes our words for us? Many times, its due to impatience. Sometimes, its genuinely due to a desire to be kind and help us out. Now, I have mixed feelings about this. When I am really stuck and someone supplies a word and it happens to be the right word, I might not get too upset. Sometimes I feel like I have been let off the hook and I don't have to continue in what seems like this eternally long block.

But if someone seems impatient and supplies a word, and it happens to be the wrong one, then I get a little ticked off. I think, "who are they to fill in my word? They can't read my mind. They don't know if that was what I wanted to say." And I stew about it, sometimes having the courage right then and there to say something and sometimes not. I hate when I don't say anything, because then its like giving them permission to keep doing it. But I don't want to intentionally embarrass anyone and quite possibly bring more attention to my stuttering. It's silly, isn't it? That I still think like this sometimes? But its the reality of stuttering. It's so complex. It is certainly not just the stuttered speech that is a concern. It is all the different emotions and feelings that go along with this.

I have done talks to various groups about stuttering and sometimes I include a piece about "how to listen to someone who stutters". I have included things like maintaining eye contact, being present, and not finishing words for them. And here I am saying its OK in certain situations. Well, in case you didn't guess, that is my covertness peeking out when I react like that. Being let off the hook reduces my shame in that stuttering moment. Yes, sometimes I still feel shame when I get stuck and nothing seems to work to smoothly get the word out.

Now, what about when someone else who stutters finishes your words for you, or vice versa? I found myself in that situation just last night while chatting with A on the phone. We were talking about a whole bunch of things and we were both stuttering naturally. We are very comfortable with each other. At one point, he was saying something and got caught in a good block. Without realizing it, I suggested the word he was looking for, and out of his mouth came, "Thanks Pam for finishing my words for me. I stutter, you know!"

I was momentarily stunned, because I couldn't believe I had done that. But more so, I couldn't believe he said that the way he did. Kudos to him for saying that right away. It didn't matter that I understood the stuttering experience because I stutter. I still had presumed it was ok to finish his words for him, and I shouldn't have. I was embarrassed and apologized. He was very good natured and said it was OK. In fact, he teasingly exaggerated his reaction of being insulted, maybe to teach me a lesson.

Later in the conversation, he again got stuck in a good block. He jokingly said, “Come on Pam! Why aren’t you filling in the word for me?” So, he got me again, with a gentle, good humored reminder that even between two people who stutter, what we share is similar yet different. We may react and feel differently about the same things. What bothers me may not bother him, and vice versa. But we have to respect each other when we are talking just as we would expect a fluent speaker to respect us.

So, A did teach me a lesson. Wanting to help someone is often a very natural instinct. I did not mean to imply that I couldn’t wait for him to finish or that he might not be able to finish, but maybe that’s what it felt like to him. I will remember that when a fluent speaker fills in a word for me. They are not necessarily being rude or impatient. They may just want to help.

I also learned that when speaking with anyone, we have to be present and patient, no matter how well we think we know the person and how connected we feel. We cannot read minds. Until the day that mind-reading becomes possible, we have to allow each of us the time needed to say what we want to say.

What do you think? Have you been on both ends of this spectrum? Can you understand why it is so complex and varies from one person to the next?

Interesting Stuttering Story

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [September 24, 2009](#)

I attended a picnic the other day for employee recognition for the agency that I used to work for. It was a really tough decision for me when I chose to leave there almost two years ago. It is such an enlightened environment. It is an organization dedicated to serving people with disabilities. I have stayed connected with them since leaving paid employment. I volunteer to be on a committee that protects the rights of the individuals who can't speak for themselves when medical decisions must be made. In June of this year, I was installed as a member of the Board of Directors. So I was invited to attend this picnic and I was delighted to be there.

The first person I saw was Jim, my former Director. He and I had a great working relationship. He was always supportive of my stuttering in the workplace and in fact encouraged me to teach him about it. As we walked into the picnic grounds, he told me a scenario about a new employee that he had recently hired who stutters. During the interview, the guy disclosed that he stutters and Jim had said that there certainly would be no problem with that. Jim told me that working with me had helped the agency learn that stuttering was just a different way of communicating.

Anyway, the guy was hired and Jim was directly involved with his training, which is unusual for a Director, but they were short staffed. The guy was a transportation assistant and would be driving a van. That required using a portable radio "walkie-talkie". When he arrived at a destination with individuals he was transporting, he was required to use the walkie talkie to announce his arrival and to request a "greeter" . He was having trouble making the radio calls, and would often have long episodes of silence.

As Jim was telling me this, he also said that he had encouraged the guy to take his time when using the radio. Jim also relayed that a couple of times the guy was late and when he would be called over the radio to see if he was OK or delayed because of traffic, there would often be no response. Jim asked me what I thought of that. They were concerned about not being able to stay in contact with this guy.

I told him that people who stutter often have trouble with phones and other communication devices. I shared with him that at the school that I now work at, I really prefer to NOT use the P.A. system to make announcements. I don't like to hear myself stutter over the microphone. And there are plenty of other people who can make announcements and don't mind doing it. I mentioned to Jim that guy was most likely "blocking" and shared with him what that was and what it felt like to block.

Jim then told me that the guy quit and took another job driving for the city where he would not have to use a radio. Jim said he hoped the guy didn't quit because of his stuttering and having to

use the walkie-talkie. I shared with him that indeed that was a possibility, and maybe the guy did not have the courage to mention to anyone that using the radio was a challenge.

It sounded to me that Jim and the agency did everything right with this employee and that it just didn't work out, for whatever reason. I think maybe Jim felt he could have done more, and generally felt bad about how this turned out.

I was happy that he felt comfortable sharing this story with me. What do you think? Do you think the guy felt pressure having to use the walkie-talkie as part of his job? Do you think Jim and the agency could have or should have done anything differently?

Looking in the Mirror

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [October 3, 2009](#)

Sometime ago I wrote about how it feels to be out of balance and feel like I lead two lives. It was in the post called [Duplicity](#). I ended that post with this line: I really want my two worlds to become one, and find that balance. At the time, I was talking about covert stuttering, and admitting to myself, and to whoever reads this, that I still find it hard sometimes to share my stuttering with some people. I still feel shame and embarrassment. Maybe those feelings will never totally leave me.

My sense of unbalance relates to more than just stuttering. Someone pointed out to me that my affirmation of self seems to have to come from others, and that it does not come from within. He asked why is it so important for me to be affirmed by others? It felt like he was questioning my integrity. Maybe he is right.

I write and share my feelings and project this Rock Star persona. But, am I really that person? Do I walk the walk? Am I honest enough with myself? Am I REAL?

I remember at last year's NSA conference, Mary and I did a workshop called, "Letting It All Hang Out: Being Real With Our Stuttering." We got so much positive feedback, as we both took risks and shared our emotional journey. We paralleled becoming real with our stuttering to the story of "The Velveteen Rabbit", the classic tale of what it takes to become real. It's a process, and a journey. I remember feeling so proud after doing that workshop. I had really shared parts of myself and allowed pieces out that had not seen the light of day in a long time. I had also allowed my emotions to come out and felt connected with the listeners. At one point, both Mary and I were choked up, and I remember seeing people in the audience getting misty-eyed too.

So now I find myself wondering – am I only real at certain times? When its convenient for me? When I need affirmation? This person's probing questions made me feel like a hypocrite.

I know we all doubt ourselves from time to time. It is normal. Right? Do you ever feel like this? That our willingness to be real varies from time and place.

Should I Have Said Something?

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [October 16, 2009](#)

Earlier in the week, I had to meet with a student and the assistant principal regarding a fairly serious rules infraction the kid had. I had taken a statement earlier from the other student involved. During the statement taking, it was just me and the student and I was mostly fluent.

In the assistant principal's office, she sat behind her desk and I sat fairly close to the young man. He was being cooperative and respectful. I think he was in a little bit of shock that the other student had actually "told on him." He may have thought he was going to get away with it.

Anyway, while talking, I was making good eye contact and the kid was acknowledging that he understood what he did was inappropriate and what the consequences would be if the infraction persisted.

Towards the end of the conversation, I said something that I blocked very hard on. I don't remember the word, but it began with k, and came out, "k-k-k-k-k-k, then the word". It was a very "dragged" block, but I was able to finish the word. I then finished my thoughts, and had a couple of minor repetitions there as well.

The assistant principal knows I stutter, but this kid didn't. It was the first time this kid and I had interacted. He didn't say anything when I blocked, but a look of surprise washed over his face, and he looked like he was trying to figure out what was going on.

I didn't say anything. I didn't acknowledge that what had happened was stuttering. I felt slightly self-conscious and uncomfortable, but I just let the moment pass. I felt that was OK to do.

Soon after, we dismissed the kid and had him return to class. The assistant principal didn't say anything to me about the stuttering moment either.

But then I had second thoughts. Should I have said something after the block? Would it have helped educate the kid? Would I have felt less self-conscious? What would you have done?

Has this ever happened to you, and you chose not to acknowledge the moment?

I'm Sorry (for Stuttering)

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [October 9, 2009](#)

Do we really do that? Apologize for stuttering?

Ramma and I talked last night and he told me that he had a couple of very tough speech days. I asked him what it was that frustrated him. Ramma said that while talking to an important authority figure, he had one of the longest blocks he has ever had. He was unable to get past an “m” and blocked on “mmmmmmmmmmmm” for what seemed an eternity. His listener was patient, and eventually supplied the word. It was the correct word. Within the context of the scientific conversation, the listener was able to correctly guess what Ramma was trying to say.

Ramma went on to tell me that he then said “sorry” to his listener. I asked why he felt the need to apologize for his stuttering. Ramma said he wasn't really apologizing for stuttering, but for the inconvenience he had subjected the listener to. I asked him what he meant. He explained that there may be a cultural difference in how the word “sorry” is used here in America and in other countries.

In America, the act of apologizing is encouraged (certainly not always done!) when someone has done something wrong that may offend another. Saying “I am sorry” is a way to express regret for the decision or behavior. In other countries, saying “I'm sorry” means roughly the same as “pardon me for holding you up.” It is more like an acknowledgement, rather an apology.

I can remember apologizing for stuttering, and then feeling awful for doing that. At our school Open House last year, I remember chatting with the grandmother of a student. We were making small talk while she waited for her grand-daughter to finish up a demonstration. While chatting, she asked me where I went to college. I attempted to say “Keuka College”, but couldn't get past the “K”. It was coming out like, “Ka-ka-ka-ka”

She was being patient, and finally guessed (wrongly), “Cayuga College.” I agreed with her, even though it was NOT the college I had attended. I then remember saying, “sorry about that.” I was indeed referring to my stuttering. She didn't know I stutter. I didn't disclose it. It didn't feel right to do that.

After we parted, I felt so awful for apologizing. I knew I shouldn't have, but something inside me felt guilty for subjecting her to that. I felt because she was at an open house at a high school, she certainly wasn't expecting anyone to talk like that.

I remember talking about that at my next self-help support group meeting. Saying out loud that I had felt the need to apologize for my stuttering and how unhappy that made me feel. We should not apologize for who we are. We are all unique and different for a reason.

I think Ramma and I both experienced the same instinctual reaction to apologize, but with the apology having different meanings in different contexts. I stand firm in the belief that we should not apologize for stuttering, BUT I can understand where it comes from. Maybe from a place deep in our core that just wants to be loved and accepted for who we are.

Has this happened to you? Have you found yourself apologizing for a stuttering moment? One thing -we shouldn't beat ourselves up over it. Our feelings, whatever they are and however they come out, are legitimate.

Being Around People Who Stutter

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [October 28, 2009](#)

Just a quick note I have a good friend that I used to work with about two years ago. We keep in touch more now that we don't work together than when we saw each other every day at work. She was always very comfortable with my stuttering in the work place, and would ask me questions sometimes, like did my stuttering vary or increase according to certain circumstances.

I remember one time she commented to me (and prefaced it with, "no offense intended"), after being with you for a while, I notice that I stutter a little bit for a day or two afterwards. At first, I didn't know what to make of her mentioning that my stuttering was "rubbing off on her", but then I just laughed, because it was kind of funny. And I actually noticed her stutter a bit sometimes after hanging out with me.

It also reminded me of when I myself have visited Southern states – Louisiana or Texas – that for a day or two afterward, I find myself speaking with a bit of a southern drawl! What's up with that? And I've had people ask, "do you realize that you're talking with an accent?"

What do you think? Do you think its possible that someone can "pick up"another's stuttering? Do you think a person who stutters might be offended by this? Or think they are being made fun of? Can speech patterns rub off on others?

On Confidence

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [November 6, 2009](#)

I had a great phone conversation last night with a person who stutters who is preparing for and participating in job interviews. We talked about how important it is to communicate with confidence, even on words that we may stutter on. This person has finished his medical training to become a doctor and he is interviewing for residencies at hospitals.

He uses speech tools to manage his blocks, which he feels is very important in presenting himself at interviews. He finds the use of bouncing and prolongation to be most helpful in managing his speech, but mostly, helping him feel confident as he goes into interview situations, which we know are highly anxious situations anyway, but especially for a person who stutters.

He practices his speech tools every day, and was eager to explain bouncing to me. He started off by bouncing 4 or 5 times on the beginning part of every word until he was feeling no tension. He then reduced the bouncing to one or two times per word, and now only uses it when he feels a block coming on. He also uses some prolongations as well, again, to help him produce difficult words confidently.

He encouraged me to try it with him over the phone. He asked me to say 5 sentences and bounce at least 4 times at the beginning of each word. I felt VERY self-conscious doing this. I explained that I tend to stutter more on the phone than I do face-to-face. I am also uncomfortable using speech tools, because in a way I feel tools make me covert again.

This conversation reminded me of two similar discussions this past week. On Sunday, I spoke with friend [Ridwan](#) who is feeling very frustrated about his lack of success on many recent interviews. He has a Masters degree in engineering and has interviewed with many employers, but so far, has had no call backs for a second interview or no job offers.

He feels very discouraged and wonders if his stuttering is getting in the way. Ridwan and I did a mock interview over the phone, and we focused on preparing answers to questions about strengths, leadership ability and career goals. We also discussed when in the interview you should bring up stuttering and how much emphasis one should place on this. After all, employers are hiring people who can do the engineering job, not who happen to stutter. We concluded with Ridwan mulling over the possibilities of calling potential employers and asking if he could do an internship with them, to get his foot in the door and acquire needed experience.

On Monday night, in self-help group, one member was talking about his lack of success in job interviews. He too stutters, and feels very discouraged and frustrated by the lack of offers coming his way. He went so far as to say he “hates his stutter” and that for him, “stuttering is a nightmare”. Fellow support group members offered him advice and support.

Today's job market is challenging and daunting. Many people are out of work, struggling to find jobs that were once plentiful. A person who stutters has to carefully analyze interview preparations and be sure he or she is absolutely putting their best foot forward. One of the best tools might just be practicing interview questions with a trusted friend or family member, and working on sounding assertive and confident.

It is not easy, this economic and employment situation we find ourselves in. As a career counselor in a high school, it is tough for me to offer good advice to students who are on the cusp of transition from school to work or higher education. I encourage many of my students to go on to college. More education is proven to help advance people in their particular career pathways.

I also encourage students and job seekers to fully examine their transferable skills. Being able to communicate with confidence and conviction during interviews is critical. But remember, communication does not include 100% fluency. We can stutter and still be very effective communicators.

What advice would you offer to people seeking employment in today's job market? Can stuttering be an asset? How can you best disclose stuttering in a job interview?

[Sharing Stuttering Acceptance](#)

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [November 9, 2009](#)

One of the things that I had always wanted to do was teach. But I thought I couldn't because of stuttering. When choosing a career path in college, I remember thinking that teaching was out of the question. It would require too much talking and who would want to hear a stutterer? So I chose a field that I thought would entail less talking- social work. Well, it didn't quite turn out to be less talking, because as we know, social workers/counselors talk to people every day. I had thought that at least I wouldn't have to stand up in front of groups and talk, and risk stuttering.

Now, some twenty years later, I am doing exactly what I thought I could never do, and in a way, I am teaching. I consider myself to be very lucky. I have put myself in a position to be talking to different groups about the stuttering experience and acceptance. And I really love doing it. It is a way for me to give and do volunteer work about something I am passionate about. Over the last two years, I have facilitated several workshops and presentations on acceptance of stuttering and how we can manage it in our lives. Something I never would have dreamed was possible. And I don't have to be a certified teacher to teach.

Two weeks ago, I helped to present a 6 hour workshop to speech language pathologists, with two other people who stutter. Our workshop covered therapy approaches for pre-school and older kids and teens, and adult considerations. I covered the section on adult issues and spent considerable time discussing covert stuttering. There were over 120 SLPs in attendance, and we received excellent feedback about our presentation. The day proved that there needs to be a partnership between professionals and people who live the stuttering experience.

Two days ago, I participated in a NSA Youth Day in Syracuse NY. I volunteered to present a workshop for parents. As it turned out, me and my friend Joe actually co-facilitated the presentation for a group that included both parents, students and professional SLPs. This was one of the most moving experiences I have had. We talked about stuttering being OK and acceptance. Parents shared their worries and fears and their hopes for their kids. Some shared that this was their first experience talking openly about stuttering, and hearing adults who stutter do so freely. Parents commented that they wished they had knew about resources like this long ago.

Some parents openly showed emotion throughout, and especially when we had everyone practice voluntary stuttering. For some parents, it was the first time they had experienced what their child experienced. Two moms who had just met practiced voluntary stuttering with each other and both were visibly moved and teary eyed. They felt a powerful connection. We then finished with having everyone try a Chinese finger trap and feel how it feels to get stuck during a block. It was a good way to end the adult workshop. We had all shared powerful emotional moments with each other. I felt very proud and honored to be a part of that with my friend Joe and new friends from Syracuse.

The kids joined the adults as we concluded the day and shared with us what they had worked on during their workshop. Some of these kids had NOT wanted to be at this workshop. Their parents had strongly encouraged them to come. The kids made a video of what its' like to stutter in public and get made fun of. It was amazing to see this, and listen as the kids excitedly answered questions about how they worked together to act this out. The kids were grinning from ear to ear. They had learned something about their own stuttering on this sunny Saturday. And the looks of pride on the adult faces was unmistakable.

A mom came up to me as we were leaving and asked if it was OK to give me a hug. She said she always thought it was her job to fix her kid. She said she feels relief to know that acceptance can be part of her job too. My eyes welled up along with hers.

Yep, it was a great way to spend a Saturday. I feel lucky to be a part of something I never thought I could do. All the smiles and tears will stay with me for a long time.

Has stuttering ever held you back? Have you ever been surprised to see that you CAN do something you never thought you could? Do you think its important for parents of kids who stutter to talk to and listen to adults who stutter?

No Ki-ki-kidding!

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [November 11, 2009](#)

I have written before that I participate in a therapeutic support group for people who stutter on Monday nights. After group, I spend time with one or two student SLPs, as part of individual therapy for me and practical work for them. This program favors fluency shaping, although they do combine stuttering modification as well. I have generally resisted fluency shaping techniques, because I see them as making me covert again. Given that, I have never really internalized any fluency techniques and so never really practiced them.

I have used this time (quite productively, I think) to work on acceptance issues and explore attitudes and feelings. I have been honest about how it feels to have had changes in my stuttering pattern, which has resulted in more overt stuttering, including blocks. Which I don't like! No kidding, right? No one likes getting stuck! Unless you stutter, you probably do not know what that truly feels like. So I have been working hard to accept this new pattern. I have tried volitional blocking, to be more aware of where I am getting stuck. It is hard enough to block, but to try and do it purposely is tough. Especially with someone watching me. I'll get to that in a minute.

A critic of mine tells me that I talk too much about acceptance. That people who have really accepted stuttering don't talk about it or write about it as much as I do. He says I shouldn't be just enduring stuttering, I should be doing something to overcome it, then acceptance wouldn't be an issue that needs talking about. No kidding? If it were that easy, parents and kids would have no problem whatsoever with stuttering, right?

So anyway, in my individual session Monday night, the two students and I got to work on attempting to feel and see where my blocks occur. Both students say they can see when I block – in my shoulders especially and even in my abdomen when I tense up and lose air flow. I did not realize that. I try to pay as little attention as I can to what the blocks look like. But I guess I wasn't really “feeling” them either. So even though I felt very self-conscious, I allowed myself to stutter freely to “catch” the blocking. I used a word that I get stuck on a lot. “Quick”. While stuttering naturally on “qu-qu-qu-quick” and really paying attention, I was able to feel my throat constrict and felt the lack of air flow.

So then I was encouraged to voluntarily block on “quick”, and no kidding, I felt it. I really felt the block. I was totally aware of my air flow being momentarily cut off, and I was doing it purposely! Yikes! I did it several more times, and was amazed to see that I could finally block purposely for the express purpose of feeling what it felt like. The students commented that again they could see the tension in my shoulders and abdomen when the air flow was squeezed off and I tried pushing the sound out.

I learned a lesson. I can really learn to desensitize myself by blocking purposely, and not feeling so flustered when it happens. Good friend Greg at [stuttering.me](#) has encouraged me to do

volitional blocking as much as I can. I really didn't think I could do it. But now I know I can. I need to know how it feels. Greg has also suggested negative practice, where I block as hard and as much as I can, in an effort to eventually be able to "turn off" the block. No kidding!

What do you think of the idea of blocking on purpose? Have you tried it? Can you see some benefit? Do you think it's a bad thing to encourage acceptance?

Stuttering and Depression

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [November 13, 2009](#)

Wow! I started this blog post about a week ago, after reflecting on some things going on in my life and talking with several people who stutter (and one who doesn't) about whether people who stutter are more prone to depression. I talked to good friend Jamie yesterday, and in asking how she has been doing, she told me to check out the latest episode of [Stutter Talk](#).

I couldn't believe it when the episode had the exact same title," Stuttering and Depression" as this blog post. I toyed with the idea of changing my title, but then figured, "Nah, I don't have to." I will link the Stutter Talk guys and episode over here. There's more than enough to go around when we confront and acknowledge our fears about depression.

Several people I know who stutter have also struggled with depression at various times. We have talked about it. Low self-esteem, constant fear of judgment, anxiety and stress related to the stuttering experience can definitely contribute to, or exasperate depression. Feeling isolated can also be depressing. And trying to keep stuttering hidden can heighten depression.

I have grappled with depression over the years, and finally feel comfortable enough to talk about it. The social punishment that greeted my stuttering, especially the negative feedback from my father, really got to me. I always felt shame about my stuttering. For a long time I didn't realize what an effect that was having on me. The more I explore my stuttering, especially my deeply ingrained covert behaviors, the more I realize how my depression and stuttering were tied together. I didn't like to acknowledge I stuttered. And I never wanted to acknowledge my depression either. That seemed shameful as well. Made me even more imperfect.

What a relief it has to been to realize that I am not the only one who stutters and has dealt with depression. Both have long had negative stigma. Anything that makes me feel more prone to judgment by others has always been difficult to surface and talk about. But the more we talk about things, the less awful they become and the more we are just reminded of our humanity. And our need to share our lives with each other.

I certainly have. I consider myself so very lucky to have friends who are willing to walk with me as I explore more and more of my tough stuff, and are OK as I let it out. I am reminded that is one of the greatest gifts – sharing and listening and taking time for each other.

[Giving Ourselves Permission](#)

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [November 23, 2009](#)

I had a very moving experience last week with one of the SLP students I have worked with over the last several months. She had the courage to confront me on why I was so resistant to speech tools that might be helpful in tense stuttering moments. I have been working so much on acceptance and letting my stuttering out. I worry that if I use speech tools, they might make me covert again. I really do think that fluency shaping techniques cover up the stuttering and that conflicts right now with my desire to be true to my stuttering self. I don't want to be held hostage to covert behaviors anymore. So I was unwilling to let any ideas in about possible strategies that I might choose to use sometimes when I am really stuck in a good block.

The student said something very simple: "Pam, at some point in our life, we all have to realize we are changing and we must allow our self to do that. " She then asked me to read a book that her Aunt had shared with her about the change process, and how we need to give ourselves permission to change, and also allow ourselves to stay open to change.

Well, I took the book and read and finished it as soon as I got home that night from our meeting. I also read several parts of the book over and over again. I decided to make a quick video to talk about how this affected me, and how much I appreciated someone being genuine enough to confront me about such a tough issue. Change is a process and we have to be open to it all throughout our lives. It is what helps us become who we will Be.

What do you think? Why is change so hard? Are some things harder for us to change than others?

[If I Can Hide It, Should I?](#)

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [November 30, 2009](#)

I have heard people say and do all kinds of things when it comes to stuttering. Some rude, some quasi-helpful, some just plain ignorant. I have seen people roll their eyes or look away or down. I have seen people not only look the other way, but walk the other way, too, as in **leave**. I have seen and heard people laugh, giggle, sigh, and point, mimic, mock or attempt to fill in words. And I have heard people say things they think will help, like, “slow down, take your time, or take a deep breath.” I have also heard people say, “are you OK?”, “what’s the matter – cat got your tongue?”, “spit it out”, “did you forget your name (or where you work)?”, or “talk much?”

The ones I got the most were: eye rolling (a boss), “talk much?” (peers), and “look aways”. Most of us who stutter have probably heard or seen some of these things at one point or another. And been annoyed, hurt, confused, or amused.

But here’s one that I have not heard before. A friend was telling me that a good friend of hers asked about her more recent overt stuttering, after years of being extremely covert. After all the careful covering, word switching, making excuses and avoidance, my friend has been working on acceptance and letting her self stutter naturally and freely. In other words, she has been true to herself, fully and wholly. She has acknowledged that she literally feels free and lighter when she does not have to work so hard to hide her stutter.

So she was very hurt when her friend commented: “If you were able to hide your stuttering so well for all those years, why are you doing it now? If you can hide it, you should.” (Or something close to that). The friend then remarked that she thought the person who stutters, who is now stuttering naturally, is just doing it to “get attention”.

Why would someone think that one would choose to stutter just to get attention? Would one choose to have cancer or be deaf, just to get attention? One certainly does get some attention when it is found out that a person is sick or maybe even dying of cancer, or is deaf and wears a hearing device. Would one choose that kind of attention anyway?

This comment by my friend’s friend (if she can really be called a friend after saying that) really bothered me. It seems that the friend thinks the stuttering, and especially stuttering just to get attention, is bad or shameful, deserving of being hidden.

There is nothing bad about stuttering. It is a part of us, just as our skin and eye color is a part of us. If our brain is wired in such a way, then ” **it is what it is** “. Trying to be covert and hide something that is part of our neurological make-up can only last so long. Or too long!

My covert stuttering lasted for more than 30 years. Or so I thought. As it turns out, when I thought I was hiding stuttering, I really wasn’t. People still knew. What I kept really hidden was

acknowledgment of the stuttering and my feelings about it. Once I stopped trying so hard not to stutter, it was like a volcano erupted. All the stuttering and blocking and secondary behaviors show up now, some very consistently, some only sporadically. Even if I wanted to, I don't think I could attempt to try and be covert anymore.

I wonder if that is how my friend felt when her friend suggested that she should go back to covering up the stuttering. Like she said, if you can, you should. BUT, it's not that easy. People who don't stutter need to walk in our shoes for a day and see what it is really like. That's why SLP students have such a hard time with pseudo-stuttering assignments. To stutter is uncomfortable, frustrating, annoying, weird, unnatural, and scary. Try doing that every day, and you will see people who stutter don't just do it to get attention.

What do you think? If you can hide stuttering, should you? If I can be fluent sometimes, shouldn't I strive to be fluent all of the time?

On Feedback

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [January 28, 2010](#)

Feedback is a gift. Good or bad, we need it from other people. We need to know how other people are thinking or feeling. We need feedback to understand certain situations, to figure out how to do new things or to know if we are on the same page. We need feedback to validate ourselves. We may think we don't – that we don't need anybody, that we are a rock, an island – but in fact, we all do at some time.

Some of us have a hard time receiving feedback. I always felt uncomfortable hearing negative feedback, or “constructive criticism” as it is oft called. If I was criticized, I always had a tendency to take it to heart and to think of myself as a bad person or that I had failed in some way. Even minor criticism could bring tears to my eyes. Still does, some times. I tend to be too hard on myself.

I have been much better at receiving and giving feedback over the last several years, as I began to let it in and allow myself to actually feel the emotions that comes with feedback. For not only did I have trouble accepting negative feedback, but I had the same trouble receiving positive feedback. I never thought I deserved praise or compliments. Much of that goes back to my childhood, when I really only got negative feedback and grew up thinking I was bad, flawed, inferior. It takes a long time to break away from internalizing bad stuff. These days, I can and do allow positive feedback in, but very often it still brings me to tears, because it is so new and parts of me still doesn't quite believe I deserve it.

I gave a speech last night to my Toastmasters club on how to give feedback and quality evaluations. People have a hard time doing this. I asked the audience to come up with some of the reasons why people struggle with offering feedback. We sometimes feel unqualified, we might be afraid of hurting the speaker's feelings, or we worry that being honest will not be encouraging for the speaker. When I first joined Toastmasters, I never would have guessed that some three years later I would feel comfortable enough to share some advice on how to offer feedback.

Everybody thought I did a good job. I got a good evaluation from a veteran Toastmaster. He did remind me that I shouldn't have concluded by saying “thanks”. The audience should have thanked me. I know that – I have shared that with other people. I felt good after hearing positive feedback.

The person who served as grammarian reported that there were a few filler words during the evening, and that some of us repeated some words. He specifically commented that I had repeated several words – “Toastmaster, Toastmaster”, “feedback, feedback”, “language, language”, “chose, chose”.

Guess what I immediately thought as I heard this? Did I stutter on those words? He doesn't know I stutter. He is a second-time visitor from another club. Did I really do whole word repetitions like that? Was it obvious enough that he felt he needed to take note of it like he did? Amazingly, I let his 15-second report make me second guess how good I had felt about nailing my speech and sharing something valuable with the group.

I even found myself wondering as I left: "Hmmm, I wonder if any of the regulars in my club will go up to him and let him know I stutter? I think its possible someone might have felt obliged to do that. I hoped no one did. I don't want to be "judged" any differently than any other person taking a risk and giving a Toastmaster's speech. I want to be able to take feedback in the spirit it is meant. To help us be aware of things we may want to work on or improve or just be aware of.

What do you think about feedback? How do you receive it? Do you think it was OK for me to ponder what he said the way I did? Or am I just way too sensitive to my stuttering?

[“You Have An Unusual Stutter”](#)

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [April 8, 2010](#)

Sheila made this comment to me while we comfortably sat in her kitchen drinking tea. As mentioned in Sheila’s post yesterday, this was all so surreal. Drinking tea in someone’s kitchen in England, over 3000 miles away from my home and we were chatting about stuttering like we had known each other our whole lives.

Anyway, I was most perplexed when Sheila mentioned that my stutter is unusual. I wanted her to elaborate more, of course. I wondered, “Did she think I sound awful? Was I unpleasant to listen to?” Why do we always assume the worst? Do these things go through everyone’s mind – those of us who stutter? It seems I am constantly trying to read someone’s mind. What an incredible waste of time and energy, as I clearly am not a mind-reader.

Anyway, when I pressed Sheila to explain, she said, “Yes, Pam, you have an unusual stutter. You make and keep eye contact and smile when you stutter. That is unusual.”

It felt good when Sheila shared that with me. A person I had just met – who is also a woman who stutters – felt comfortable enough to share that with me.

That made an impression, obviously, as I am writing about it. Reminds me of the time someone told me my stutter is attractive.

Is it that unusual for people who stutter to make eye contact and actually smile while stuttering? Hmm, I hope not. Let’s strive to make that the norm, OK?

Interrupting

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [May 26, 2010](#)

One thing (of many) I am learning as I undertake this new venture with podcasting is how hard it is to not interrupt a guest as she is speaking. This has never been much of a problem for me, but I am aware of it as we are talking. I also notice it in the play-back of some episodes while editing.

What is happening may or may not be unique to stutterers having a dialogue. When the guest pauses, I notice I have been jumping in, eager to make a point or ask a question. Sometimes, it is a stuttering moment that I am stepping on.

The guest might be engaged in a hesitation or a block and I do not realize it until they continue to speak, and we then are both speaking at the same time. I wind up saying I am sorry. It feels so awkward!

This is new territory for me. I don't like being interrupted myself or having someone step on my words, or finish my words for me. In this new venture, conducting an internet radio show, I am now conversing with different women with different stuttering patterns and sometimes I find myself stepping in at the wrong time. Ouch!

So far, no harm has been done. "No problem" has been graciously uttered several times to my "I'm sorry".

I might be a little too self-conscious of this myself, as I strive to find my groove in this new role as podcast host. It makes me wonder if fluent speakers ever have to think of this. Probably not. If you listen to a podcast or radio talk show with fluent speakers, there is a natural ebb and flow to the back and forth dialogue.

There isn't the same natural flow with stutterers who are conversing. We have involuntary stoppages and prolongations. It seems we have to be more poised to listen if the speaker is finished with a thought, or caught in a stuttering moment. Hey, wouldn't that be good for fluent speakers to work on too?

I find it incredulous that I am even thinking of this, and making myself more cognizant of my own need to sharpen my active listening skills. Which is a good thing. After all, 90% of communicating is listening.

Has anyone else experienced this? Does it make you feel awkward? Is it just a "stuttering thing"?

[My Brother's Question](#)

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [August 28, 2010](#)

I have written a few times that I really only comfortably discuss stuttering with one sibling regularly. Most of my family doesn't like talking about it, even though I do. Kim and I talk about stuttering often. She works as a nurse and feels my openness about my stuttering has helped her be more patient with some of her patients.

I did talk about stuttering twice with another sister, who was willing to do an audio conversation with me once. But that's it. With most of my family, it's the same taboo it pretty much always was. Unless I bring it up.

So I was surprised when my brother called me last night. He needed a favor and also wanted some advice about stuttering for a co-worker.

A new employee works in the warehouse and in my brother's words, has a "wicked stutter". He wanted to know if I had any brochures or literature on anything that has helped me that he could leave "subliminally" around. I said sure, I could give him stuff or send him some links with resources.

I had to laugh when I got off the phone with my brother. His use of the word "subliminally" tickled me. I can just see this poor guy who stutters, minding his own business in the warehouse, and suddenly he stumbles on some information about stuttering. Which would be really out-of-place in the warehouse environment.

I was glad my brother felt comfortable enough asking me about this. He never has initiated conversation about stuttering with me. But I also had a few other thoughts.

It made me wonder, how will this guy feel? Will he be embarrassed? Will he think colleagues are embarrassed by his stutter, that's why someone left stuttering information lying around? Or will he be happy to come across something that might help him? Will he be grateful that it was done anonymously? Will he take the information or ignore it?

It made me wonder, how would I feel? What about you? Would you be OK if you found something on stuttering suddenly and randomly in your workplace?

Eating Lightbulbs

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [November 9, 2010](#)

Have you ever dealt with painful stuff that you just hoped would go away if you just ignored it? I used to be an expert at it – trying to push pain away, hoping it would just disappear. But sadly, it doesn't work like that. We have to feel it if we are ever to move past it.

Part of the reason I was so good at being a covert stutterer was that I had learned from a very early age how to pretend everything was OK when it really wasn't. How it felt to stutter, to struggle, to feel different, to not be able to talk about things.

The same with the childhood stuff. Covering up my mother's alcoholism, my father's abuse, and his crazy religious ideas, and not being able to talk about any of that, ever. Everything was covert, not just the stuttering.

I had myself convinced for a long time that if I just pushed the painful stuff away and denied it, that it never really existed. But it never went away, it just stayed buried in a deep down place. Lately its been surprising me by exploding all over, much like a dormant volcano when ready to erupt.

Funny how these things happen. You begin to work on one thing and you find yourself dealing with everything else. Opening Pandora's box about stuttering has allowed an opening for the other stuff to seep out. I can't process how I felt about hiding my stuttering all those years without also talking about how it felt to hide the other stuff too.

I had myself convinced that not feeling, being numb, was safer, easier somehow. I did not want to feel yesterday's pain anymore. But what I have learned is this: in order to heal and keep moving forward, I have to feel those painful moments and give voice to those painful memories. I have done well with facing my fears and shame about stuttering, by talking about it and being open, not hiding any more.

Now I have to do the same thing with the other stuff, in order to continue my healing and rid myself of guilt. Maybe I really am on the path to forgiveness. Then I won't have to be so uncomfortable with feelings anymore. Because that's what most of my journey has been about – being numb and not dealing with feelings.

J has been helping me with this. As we go deeper and deeper into that inner space of mine, the feelings are coming up. I have been really angry at my parents for a long time, and sad for that little girl that I still identify with, who was lonely and scared and confused.

When these feelings surface, and they have more and more lately, J pushes me to identify what I feel. I used to just swallow the feeling, push it down, but now I am letting myself feel, even when it causes real pain.

I talked with friend Jill recently and we shared some deep stuff. She used the phrase “eating light bulbs”. I knew exactly what she meant. Every time I feel the wave of sadness or anger or guilt come up, I feel like I am swallowing shards of a light bulb or a Christmas ornament that was dropped.

Tiny, jagged pieces of glass ripping at my throat and insides as I swallow. It hurts. But it hurt way back then too and I need to acknowledge it. Maybe that’s what I am learning here – how to eat light bulbs the right way.

Tug-Of-War

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [December 6, 2010](#)

Remember playing this game as a kid? I never liked it. I didn't see the point, and it always seemed I got rope burn trying to pull so hard. And as the game goes, the harder you pull, the more effort the other side expends so they can win.

Speaking of rope burn, I also remember as a kid sliding down some huge slide sitting on a burlap sack. I can't remember where, but the memory just came roaring back. That experience was like a tug-of-war too. I remember feeling gloriously free careening down the slide, caressed and stung by the wind and having no worries during that fast and furious moment.

And then the moment at the bottom when I realized the ride was over and my butt had slid off the burlap sack and I had rope burn all up and down my legs. The price I paid for that exhilarating run. I wish someone had told me to wear pants!

I have discovered that you can also play tug-of-war with feelings. Someone reminded me that if I expect those close to me to know what I want and need without telling them directly, I will be disappointed. This is akin to mind-reading, which most of us don't do very well.

I know this intellectually, but emotionally it is still often hard for me to be direct about my feelings and even identify what it is that I am feeling. There must be a way to strike a balance between the desire to show my feelings and pressing my autopilot button to conceal my truest self, which I did for a long time. It was my survival tactic.

Simply put, as I was gently reminded, I am not used to anyone showing care and tenderness toward me. I don't know how to react, or how to let it in. I want to, but the feelings that rush up overwhelm me. They are a bittersweet mix of joy and sadness. Mourning, if you will, for not having felt genuine tenderness enough to know how to deal with it.

Feeling for real, and expressing how I feel, is still so foreign that I don't trust it. I grew up thinking that if I let people know my true self, somehow they would get the upper hand, which everyone already seemed to have anyway. I have been told that this is common for children of alcoholics. There were no emotions expressed – everything real was repressed and avoided. That's how I got so good at covering up my stuttering.

So this tug-of-war with feelings is vexing me now. It is not as easy to hide anymore. As I heal and continue uncovering and exposing my true self, people are coming in. I have been so used to holding people and feelings at arm's length, that usually I don't even notice I am doing it.

Maybe I can have that glorious feeling of careening freedom again, right smack into life instead of down a slide on my butt on a burlap sack . Maybe I will figure out how to avoid the rope burns. Or maybe I'll just figure out how to stop pulling so hard.

[Watching Yourself Stutter](#)

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [December 28, 2010](#)

I recently read on one of the stuttering forums that a good way to desensitize yourself to your own stuttering is to watch yourself stutter in a mirror. Thing is, I don't stutter the same when I am alone with the guts to look in a mirror.

The week before Christmas I facilitated a story-telling circle with a very supportive audience. These were people who understand the value of sharing our stories, as any one story has the potential to trigger an impact on someone else. So this group were wonderful listeners. I felt very honored sharing some of my stuttering stories with them, one a very personal one that I had never shared the way I did that night.

It was very empowering for me to tell my stories, especially to an audience of people who do not stutter. And because it was storytelling, which is very different from giving a speech, I did not use notes. So I wasn't quite sure how it would unfold, as I planned to just tell from the heart.

I knew it would be special, so I had a friend record the three stories I told. I wanted to have a record of what I told. I spent a lot of time editing the video clips, as I planned to share the clips, my message, with others.

It was very hard watching the videos of myself telling and stuttering. It is one thing to hear myself stutter, like when I do the podcasts or even just hear myself talking to others. But to "see my stuttering", it kind of brought tears to my eyes the first time. I saw how deliberate I was, I saw what my pauses looked like, I saw what multiple-repetitions looked like. A couple of times, I saw one eye squeeze closed when I blocked. And I saw some physical tension.

Watching myself tell my stories and stutter very openly with people I did not know well was very emotional, very poignant for me. I wondered as I watched (the video) what the listeners thought as they watched me.

It was not easy watching the first time. But I did watch several more times and it was easier. I caught the point where I almost choked up, but didn't. And I realized that sometimes I stutter a lot, and sometimes hardly at all.

I don't think I could ever purposely practice stuttering in front of a mirror. It would be contrived, not real. It would not help me be any more comfortable stuttering publicly.

It takes a lot of guts to be who you are in the many different areas of our lives. And to look back on those moments and realize just that. Watching myself be myself in front of others can't be replicated in private with a mirror.

Real life needs us to be ready to be ourselves when it counts. When sharing our gift of self can make a big difference.

Should Prof Help Stuttering Student?

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [February 4, 2011](#)

Last night I got a call from a professor from an elite university here in my area. She is teaching a graduate level physics class which is just getting underway for the semester. One of her students is from China and is pursuing his graduate degree in engineering.

The professor shared with me that he has a severe stutter. She says she talked with him about it and he told her that there is nothing that can be done for him. She wanted to find some resources to educate herself and to pass on to him, if she senses he would be OK with that.

She told me on the first night of class, she partnered students up in pairs for introductions, and she purposely paired herself with the student who stutters. As she told me this, her tone seemed to imply that she thought she was protecting him. Each person in the pair had to introduce the other.

When the professor introduced this student, she told the class that he stutters, that it is nothing to fear or shy away from, and that it will be an expectation of the class that he participate as often as everyone else and that patient listening would be the norm. She asked me if I thought she did the right thing.

My immediate reaction was, Yes, if he was OK with it. I asked her, “How did he seem to react to that? Was he embarrassed?” She said no – he seemed fine with it, maybe a little even relieved.

I then said that I thought it was great she was taking the initiative to make it OK to talk about. I shared with her how I felt in college, when I was presenting and felt so humiliated, and no one said anything, just didn’t look at me and looked like they pitied me. I told her I would have much rather been in an open, supportive atmosphere, which she is obviously trying to do for this student.

She asked me for resources, specifically if I had any experience with therapy. I shared with her what was available in the area, and explained my take on fluency shaping and stuttering modification. She asked specific questions about both, and I could hear her writing this information down. (Smile!)

I also gave her some information on self-help and support, and some web resources, again realizing she was writing all of this down. She even asked me if there were any good books that I could recommend, so she could educate herself, and in turn, her student. I gave her information on Van Riper’s and Guitar’s stuttering textbooks and Jezer’s memoir about his life experiences with stuttering.

I was really happy this woman called and I was able to answer some questions. She had seen my name affiliated with a newspaper article I had written and with an upcoming workshop I am doing at our community library.

I was also impressed that a university professor took the time and showed an interest in educating herself to better help a student.

What do you think? Do you think the way she introduced the issue of stuttering to her class was appropriate?

[You Seem More Disfluent Today](#)

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [February 8, 2011](#)

There would have been a time, only a few years ago, that those words would have mortified me. But when I went into Jay's office yesterday, that's one of the first things he said to me. After our usual small talk, he said, "You seem more disfluent than usual today, Pam. How are you with this?"

Funny how being more open invites others to be able to comment and ask about something that so exposes our vulnerability.

Was I ok with it? Well, I hadn't got much sleep the night before and we met at the end of the work day. I know I stutter more when I am tired or stressed. And I did have quite a "stuttery" day at work. A couple of times I really got stuck with co-workers.

Yes, I was OK with it. Because I know and trust Jay and we talk openly about most everything. The real question is: would I be OK if someone I did not know quite so well had commented and asked the same question.

We went on to discuss some of what I have been up to recently. I have been a bit busy. I have a workshop on stuttering this week and I am getting ready to travel to Milwaukee in a few weeks to talk about stuttering. And the podcast conversations with women who stutter keep happening.

Jay says to me, "You're becoming quite an expert. How does that feel?"

I immediately responded, "No way, I am not an expert." He says, "Why? Isn't that allowed? Can't you just be open to the fact that you are? All the reading you have done, all that you have learned, all the interactions you have with other people who stutter! You don't think that makes you an expert?"

He wasn't done. "You know, you have a way of getting people to open up and share. Are you saying that what you have learned from all this doesn't make you an expert? You don't have to have PhD after your name to be an expert. Is that what you are thinking?"

"If you are not an expert, then who are the experts?"

I was speechless for a moment. How did we get here? How did a simple comment about him noticing I was more disfluent get to a discussion on what constitutes being an expert?

It frankly made me uncomfortable. Thinking about myself as an expert doesn't feel right, considering that I haven't gone to school and don't have "letters after my name", like those "in the field." I allowed myself to say what I was thinking out loud.

And Jay immediately said, "Then do something. Or maybe you already are doing something, and you just won't let yourself admit it."

I drove home thinking about all this, wondering what I am supposed to do with this. Why did we have this conversation?

Maybe that is a question worth more thought. Who are the experts?

[A Monday WOW Moment!](#)

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [March 1, 2011](#)

I had a great experience yesterday at my school that I wanted, well needed, to share. Two weeks ago I did a workshop at a library called “An Un-Royal Talk About Stuttering: Lessons from The King’s Speech”. It was free and open to the community and we had close to 50 people there. One of them present was a colleague of mine, who had seen the movie, knew I stuttered and was really interested in learning more. She also brought her mother.

She came to me the next day and asked if I would do a similar presentation to the Adult LPN classes, one today and the other one, in a more remote location, next week. She felt students preparing to work in the medical field could benefit from hearing this information from someone who lives it every day. I was nervous, but agreed.

I changed the presentation slightly to adapt to a nursing student’s point of view but planned to keep it close to what I had already done, so I didn’t have more work to do.

One of the first things I started with was the question how many in the class had seen the movie! ZERO! These are all working adults with families who take a demanding and intensive LPN course in 10 months and have little time to breathe, let alone watch a movie.

So I quickly changed my focus, and started telling MY story, hoping they wouldn’t be bored to tears. I shared about my covert years, why I chose that, the hidden feelings of shame and my reluctance to ever show emotion and vulnerability, in addition to stuttering publicly. I shared how I got fired, there was a collective gasp, they wanted to know wasn’t that illegal, etc. I started getting emotional, and one of the teachers brought me the Kleenex box!

Then I shared how my family had NEVER talked with me, or about stuttering, so it was always hard to talk about. I talked about how profoundly my life changed when I was fired and how I decided I wasn’t going to pretend anymore. I was going to let ME out.

You could have heard a pin drop in the room. I noticed and heard a few sniffles. At one point, I asked if anyone knew anyone who stutters, or does anyone stutter. One young woman in her 20’s raised her hand – she said , “I stutter” with tears streaming down her face.

I asked if her class knew, they were all looking now, and she said no, not until that moment. Her classmates then applauded. One girl said, “I thought so, but you are always so quiet, I wasn’t sure”. Heads were nodding and the girl who had disclosed smiled and looked OK.

I started talking about what stuttering is and what it isn't, and the teacher in the room asked if it drove me insane if people finished my words for me. I smiled and said yes, she said, that as nurses, they are inclined to just want to help.

I then described the different ways stuttering can manifest, and when I got to sometimes people will use lots of filler words, like uhm, and that I used to do that, another hand went up, and a woman said, "OMG, that's exactly what my 14-year-old son does, all the time. Maybe he stutters. I keep telling him to slow down, take a deep breath", and she asked what I thought of that. I smiled and said that's generally not helpful.

She looked concerned and asked out loud, "have I been making it worse for him?" and I said "if we could, we would". She said she was going to talk to her child about it. She whispered "thank you" to me.

Towards the end, we were running out of time. We had not talked about the movie at all. I showed 1 minute of the 2 minute trailer. They got it. I then asked them if they had ever heard of Porky Pig, and what was he known for. They all knew. They stayed 10 minutes over, which the teachers told me they NEVER do. And they gave a huge applause at the end.

Several came up to me privately, and one more admitted she stutters and is dyslexic but has not told anyone, and that she "got me". She said she has felt such a huge disconnect, but felt connected with my story as soon as I started telling it. She started crying as we spoke privately and she said she never heard anything this courageous as a teacher standing up in her school telling this story. She kept saying over and over "I got you."

Who would have thought? 40 students in this Adult class, 2 stutter and one has a child who stutters.

This was a WOW moment for me and I wanted to share it!

Will They Feel Cheated?

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [March 11, 2011](#)

I had an insightful conversation last week with a friend. We were discussing work and the impact of stuttering and how we deal with it when “it” comes up. My friend is not covert at all and could not hide her stuttering to save her life. So, its fair to say her stuttering is pretty obvious.

She and a partner have a successful business and she handles most of the marketing and is the on-line presence. New customers are “handed over” to the other partner to “deal with”. She thinks because her stutter is severe, it’s better and smarter to have her partner deal with “in-person” communication. Of course I disagree, but our choice to talk about it offered valuable insight.

My friend is very good at what she does. So good, in fact, that she is repeatedly asked to present at conferences. She repeatedly declines these invitations to speak. When I asked why, she said, “well, its obvious. I can’t convey my message”. I pressed her, by asking “according to who?” If she has never presented at a conference, then she doesn’t know her message won’t be conveyed. Right? We can’t be afraid of what we don’t know!

The plot thickens. She very matter-of-factly and honestly told me she fears tricking and cheating people. Huh? I did say that – HUH? She is a great writer, and a loud internet presence. She tells the truth like she sees it, honestly expresses her opinion and says what she thinks, all of the time, even at the risk of pissing others off. That’s why she is so good!

So she thinks people will expect the same loud, brash, “say-it-like-it-is” real person they know virtually. She said people will be disappointed when they meet her in person, and she opens her mouth, and st-st-st-st-stutters. That she will have cheated them. I did not understand this and pressed on boldly (uncharacteristic of me, I know!)

She told me people pay thousands of dollars to attend these professional conferences, and that many would sign up for her talk based on name alone. (Wow, to be that self-confident! She can be, because she’s that good).

Then, when she began to talk, or try to, or block or make painfully uncomfortable facial grimaces, people would know. She would be exposed for the fake and the fraud that she really is. That she is not who they were led to believe she was. And that they had been robbed of their money and would feel cheated. And deserve their money back!

I offered gentle reassurance that of course people wouldn’t be that shallow. That professional adults would absolutely accept her for who she is. And she just looked at me and said, “well, if I

stuttered like you do, sure maybe. But that's not going to happen in my case. And we both know it".

So my friend asks her fluent partner to handle all of the presentations. For the sake of the business. She says sure, she feels a little guilty, pushing all that extra work on to one person. She hopes that it will soon get easier to share the workload when they get up to speed and bring on a third person.

A person that can speak. That will not deceive conference attendees. That will not demand their money back because they felt cheated.

What do you think?

Who Gets To Make The Choice?

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [June 14, 2011](#)

I have never written about how I feel about stuttering being a disability. I have been asked about it and I have talked about it, both with those who stutter and those who don't. I know disability can be a very contentious subject, because some feel strongly that stuttering is a disability and others feel if it doesn't limit their life, then it's not.

I believe that my stuttering is not a disability (there was a time it was). It does not substantially limit my ability to speak or communicate today, as defined by the [American's With Disability Act of 1990](#) (ADA), which was amended in 2008.

These days, I speak and communicate very effectively, even on the days when I stutter a lot. There was a time when I did not. I was so afraid of stuttering publicly and being judged, that I often opted out of speaking situations, or avoided. That fear was very disabling to me. I felt invisible.

The ADA definition of disability also means whether a person has a record of an impairment or is "regarded as having an impairment", whether or not the impairment impedes a major life activity. Which in the case of stuttering, would be speaking and communication.

It's this part that I want to speak to – being regarded as having a disability. I recently had a conversation with my supervisor about upcoming changes in my job assignment. My current position has been abolished effective June 30, and I have been laid off. I am hopeful that another position will be available for me to remain within the same organization.

My supervisor mentioned that the grant funding has changed direction. The major initiative of our grant will focus on ensuring access and equity of services and programs to special needs populations. This will include not only groups with disabilities, but also economically underserved groups.

My boss mentioned that I would be perfect for this position because of my disability. I was offended by how he said this. I don't consider myself disabled, and am bothered that my boss obviously does. This is not the first reference he has made about stuttering as a disability.

Last year, when he did my annual evaluation and went over it with me, he said, "aren't you proud of me that I didn't use the term "disability" once in your evaluation?" And the year before that, after my first public speaking event at school, he commented, "you didn't have to try to climb the mountain and ride your bicycle up it also all in the same night."

When I had asked him what he had meant by that, he further explained, "if you knew you were going to butcher the kid's names, why didn't you ask someone else to read the names for you?" I remember writing about this before, and also remember how angry I felt by what he said.

There is a good chance I may get a position serving special populations (which I have been doing indirectly for a long time anyway). I will need to be an even louder advocate for those who can't always advocate for themselves. I have been thinking a lot about where I stand on my stuttering being a disability.

Because I am known to stutter, therefore, I am obviously "regarded as" a stutterer, which fits the definition of disability under the ADA. But I don't consider myself disabled. And my boss's perception of me having a disability, while certainly not bad, somehow doesn't sit right with me.

A friend of mine said that I should label my stuttering as a disability if I plan to move along with my small business. That it will net me more opportunities, being able to use the term "minority owned" business. Like getting two for the price of one. Being a woman and disabled would possibly steer more business my way.

I definitely don't like the idea of "using the disability card." But I know some people do, to move forward in life.

What do you think of this? Whose choice should it be to consider one's stuttering a disability?

Emotionally Inarticulate

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [September 21, 2011](#)

Sometimes I wonder if I am the only one who experiences this, but I know this cannot be true. Everyone must, from time to time. Here's what I mean. Sometimes, I feel emotionally paralyzed by a situation and find myself unable to say what I want to say.

And it has nothing to do with my stuttering. It's all emotional. There are times when I know what I want to say, or should say, but something between my head, heart and gut freezes and nothing comes out. I find myself emotionally inarticulate.

A really good example of this happened recently, and is in fact, still ongoing.

My father is seriously ill and hospitalized. Last week, he had several large brain tumors removed. I chose not to go and see him, before or after the surgery, despite the risk that he might not survive.

This was not an easy decision for me, as I felt pressured by two of my siblings to join them and "sit vigil" during the surgery. I did not want to. To me, it felt fake.

I have been virtually estranged from my father for years, and we have not talked beyond the once or twice obligatory holiday greetings over the last several years.

I suppose both of us share the blame for this estrangement. I cannot get past feeling let down by my father time after time, and feeling (but not expressing) so angry. And since he re-built a family, he has taken no real initiative to take any interest in my life as an adult.

Maybe it's time to leave the past in the past, but for some reason, I find myself unable to. And I cannot even articulate why.

I feel two of my siblings were being judgemental and criticizing me for not sitting vigil with them. I found it hard to even let them know how I felt. Both of them asked me the question, "How are you going to feel if he dies? Aren't you going to regret that you didn't see him one last time before that happens?"

There are things that I wish I could say to my sisters. Like, "don't judge me. We all have different ways of dealing with things."

And there are things I wish I could say to my father, but I know I can't without feeling extremely vulnerable and getting too emotionally upset. I have always felt he was ashamed of me, stemming back from when I first began stuttering.

If I had the courage, I would want to ask him if he has ever been proud of me, and loved me for who I am, and not what he wished I was. But I can't seem to do that. Around these most vulnerable and painful matters, I remain emotionally inarticulate. Why?

[What Makes You Tic?](#)

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [November 25, 2011](#)

Last week I went to a presentation on tolerance. The name of the program was called “What Makes You Tic?” The speaker was [Marc Elliott](#), a man in his twenties who was diagnosed with Tourette’s Syndrome when he was 9 years old.

He has lived with strange physical tics for many years, as well as inappropriate outbursts of name calling, cursing, and loud, odd noises.

His most-notable tic is/was the slamming together of his teeth, loudly enough to hear his upper and lower teeth grind and make contact. Imagine doing that for over 20 years!

[His talk was very inspirational.](#) He shared about how he often found himself explaining to people in school or out in public that his weird movements or sounds were not intended to bother or offend anyone, but that they were involuntary.

He also has lived with a rare intestinal disorder, making the “taken-for-granted” bodily task of relieving himself a particular challenge as well. He talked about never wanting to use a public restroom. He always felt he was being judged. Even when all he could see, and others could see, were ankles and shoes at the bottom of a stall.

If he heard someone come in to the bathroom, he would make himself stop “his business” in mid-action, in order not to be judged (or so he thought, in his mind.)

This is very similar to stuttering. How often have you chose not to speak, or switched words, for fear of how someone would react?

During his talk, Marc made reference to stuttering. I was not surprised. I knew there was some closeness (in the brain area) between stuttering and Tourette’s syndrome. And I am always interested in how people with differences manage in their daily lives.

Marc shared that in the last 5 months, he has gained such a level of acceptance for his tics, that he rarely tics in public anymore. He said he almost never thinks about the fear of how others may perceive him, which has given him control over his tics. This is where he made reference to stuttering. And what surprised me, frankly.

He indicated that like Tourettes, if people who stutter could just forget that they stutter, like we do when we sing (!), we would be able to reduce or eliminate stuttering, like he has done with his tics.

He never quite told us how he has eliminated his tics. He said we could read about that in his book, (of the same title, [“What Makes You Tic?”](#)) which is due out by the end of the year.

At the end of the program, many people started lining up to speak with him. I got in line, deciding to let him know (gently) what I thought of his comment about stuttering.

I was close to the front of the line, and listened while some young girls cooed about how amazing and inspirational he was. An excited group of three got another friend to take a picture of them with Marc.

When it was my turn, I introduced myself, using some voluntary stuttering until real stuttering took hold. I told him I enjoyed his talk, but was a little curious about his reference to stuttering. I shared with him that if not thinking about stuttering was all it took for me to not stutter, like he no longer tics, then I needed to know the secret right away.

I also said, “I bet you didn’t think anyone who stutters would be in this audience, huh?” He did seem genuinely surprised and commented that he was glad I had come up to him. He also said he was grateful that I had shared a little about stuttering, and that maybe he needs to get more information before he “uses that connection” again.

We spoke for just a few minutes, but I knew I had his attention. While we spoke, he “ticked” quite obviously – his mouth clamped tight a couple of times and his gaze was all over the place. Maybe it was because I was stuttering freely, or like me (with my stuttering), he tics more one-on-one with someone than he does/did when he was on the stage talking and using a microphone.

I think he was actually surprised that I came up to him and had the guts to gently point out (for me anyway) that his analogy about “not thinking” about stuttering wasn’t the answer.

He thanked me and gave me a hug before I left.

I was glad I went up to him and was honest and stuttered openly. We all learn from each other.

Be Memorable!

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [December 2, 2011](#)

I really don't want to be identified as the lady who stutters at work. But I know darn right well that is how some people know me and remember me.

I stutter during one-on-one conversations, I stutter on the phone and I am known to stutter when making small or large group presentations. Contrary to what I used to think, most people in my world know I stutter.

There's certainly worse things to be known for, right?

I could be known as the one everyone hates dealing with because she never follows through.

Or I could be the one that everyone knows is always late.

Or I could be known as the one that you can't tell anything to because she can't be trusted.

On one of the stuttering forums I visit, someone was talking about how it's too bad some people reach "old age" and never come to terms with the fact that they stutter.

He shared an observation that he had when he had a group of people over to his home recently. People were gathered around, talking, laughing, chiming in when they had something to contribute. He also noted that there were several different conversations actually going on at the same time.

He found it interesting to watch how people jockeyed for the right moment to jump in and add something to a conversation when they had something they wanted to contribute. Sometimes people talked over one another and interrupted.

He also mentioned that he didn't contribute much because he really didn't have much to say, and was rather busy keeping people "watered and fed."

But when he did have something to say, the conversations stopped and everybody listened. Because this guy insists that he not be interrupted when he speaks. Sometimes he struggles to get his words out, so when he does want to contribute, everybody listens.

I likened this to being memorable. People remember people who stand out and say something compelling and valuable, even when stuttering while sharing their point.

A friend and I talked about our stuttering last night. He was venting how frustrating it feels to him to have conversations at work with colleagues or people in authority. He feels like no one knows who he is.

I told him what I thought about that! My take is that he feels that way because he rarely takes opportunities to initiate conversation and “make people want to hear more from him.”

When I said this, he looked at me with this “raised eyebrow look” of his that means, “What the hell are you talking about?”

I said to him, “You have to be memorable. You stutter, so be so compelling in what you say while stuttering, that people will definitely remember you.” I had his attention. I could see his wheels churning.

There’s worse things, right?

[It Still Surprises Me](#)

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [December 29, 2011](#)

It still surprises me when someone tries to finish my words for me. Since I am so open about stuttering and mostly everyone who knows me knows I stutter, I guess I believe that people should not do that.

But it appears to almost be instinctual on some people's part. Maybe it really does boil down to people just wanting to be helpful.

I saw my niece the other day, for the first time in a while in person. We stay in touch via Facebook and texting, but that's not the same of course.

We arranged to meet somewhere on Christmas Eve. I had some items to pass along to her. We only chatted for a few minutes.

In that brief few minutes, I got stuck on a word and my niece filled it in for me, quickly. I hate when people do that, but I didn't say anything. I hadn't seen her in a while. Maybe she forgot I stutter! And I didn't want to embarrass her by saying anything, because it happened within seconds.

But it still surprised me! That she did it, how I felt about it, and that I didn't say anything, that I just let it pass.

Someone else supplied a word for me earlier this week at work as well. It was very casual, in passing, I don't even remember who it was. But still it struck me. I was surprised that it happened again.

Are people really trying to help out when they fill in a word for us? Or do they feel so awkward with the stuttered moment that they feel they must say the word in order to keep the conversation flowing forward?

On Being Laughed At

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [January 27, 2012](#)

I read a piece on laughter on another blog ([Brian Scott Herr](#)) and was really able to resonate with what he wrote. He talks about being laughed at by a customer service person when he was purchasing tickets and stutters.

All of us who stutter have had this happen, as kids and teens, and into adulthood. I know – it has happened to me more as an adult than as a kid!

Why? Because I am more open with my stuttering now as an adult. When we stutter openly, we can feel vulnerable and exposed. We feel particularly vulnerable when we encounter someone unfamiliar with stuttering and their first reaction is to laugh at us.

It hurts when that happens! I used to get really upset and feel my eyes fill up with tears, and struggle to compose myself until I was done with whatever I was doing and then I would practically run out to my car. And cry! Tears of embarrassment and anger!

Anger at having been laughed at for something I can't help. But also anger at my own inability to say anything. My shame would paralyze me to the point that I just froze and couldn't say anything.

It still happens! I get laughed at or mocked occasionally. It hurts! Sometimes my eyes fill up right away, because it stings. And then I get mad at myself for letting those tears well up.

But one thing has changed. Now I am confident and comfortable most of the time (notice I say "most") to say something when someone laughs or mocks my stuttering. I usually say something like, "just so you know, I stutter. I am OK with that, but I am not OK with someone laughing or making fun of me. It hurts my feelings."

People are usually surprised when I say that. Some get embarrassed and apologize profusely. Some turn red and don't say anything. Some say, "oh, you do not." Or, "I stutter sometimes too."

I do not address someone who laughs at me because I want them to feel bad or embarrassed. I do it for ME! That's right, ME!

I don't deserve to be laughed at or mocked just because I stutter or sometimes have a long pause when a word gets stuck. No one does.

Not everyone is in the place on their journey where they feel comfortable addressing someone who laughs at stuttering. It takes courage. It involves taking a risk. Not only have we stuttered, but then we are going to call more attention to it.

Laughing is good for the soul. We all need to laugh – at things that are funny, not hurtful.

And we need to laugh at ourselves once in a while too, meaning not take our self too seriously. I still have to work on that. I have to work every day at believing that I deserve to be treated and listened to with respect. That starts within.

We should always be laughing with someone, not at someone's expense.

What are your thoughts?

Negative Reactions Still Sting

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [February 20, 2012](#)

I was in an important meeting earlier in the week, with two of my colleagues and two guests from another organization. I had reached out to the other agency, inviting them to meet with us so we could explore a partnership. I had done the initial outreach by phone.

This was an important meeting. Everybody in the room had a vested interest in brainstorming and getting both opportunities and challenges onto the table. A partnership with this agency means a “win-win” for both organizations, and ultimately the individuals we serve.

Since I had convened the meeting, I led off, introducing people and getting right to the point. Early in, I blocked and then had some repetitions. The woman guest snickered and had a bemused expression. I didn’t say anything, but continued talking and had another minor block. The woman laughed again and showed “the look”, you know the one I mean.

Out of the corner of my eye, I could see my female colleague catch my eye and question me with just her eyes. She was silently asking, “well, how are you going to handle this?”

I am one of those persons who doesn’t want to make my stuttering an issue in professional environments. At this meeting, we were not convened to talk about stuttering. But I had to say something. This woman obviously did not know how to react when encountering someone who stutters.

It also bothered me, a LOT. I was surprised that a manager in a social services agency would be so disrespectful, even if that was not her intent.

So I very quickly said, “Pardon me, you should know I stutter, and I’m OK with it. I hope you can be too.” The woman then blushed, looked down, and said “I’m sorry.”

I momentarily felt guilty. I did not mean to embarrass her or make her feel bad. But she had unknowingly (I assume) made me feel bad and I needed to get the “pink elephant” out in the open right away and then move on. Which I did.

I continued talking, and stuttering, and then we all participated in a great dialogue and had a productive meeting. My stuttering was a non-issue for the rest of the meeting.

Afterwards, I asked my colleague what she thought of the way I had handled it. We have only worked together for 3 months. She said, “You had to say something. Once you did, it became a non-issue, and we moved forward. You did the right thing.”

She then said, “You must get that a lot, huh?”

I knew what she meant and wished it wasn’t true, but she is right. Yes, I get those looks and snickers a lot from people who don’t know I stutter before they learn that I actually do.

People seem surprised. Like they don’t expect a person in a position that requires so much communication to happen to stutter.

When this happens, I feel it is my responsibility to educate the listeners, so we can move forward.

Even though I am very accepting of my stuttering, I will admit that negative reactions like this still sting. I still feel hurt when it happens, even when I know it was not intentional

What do you think? Do you “get this” a lot? How would you have responded? Do you think I did the right thing?

Introductions

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [February 27, 2012](#)

I have been involved with [Toastmasters](#) for almost six years. I love it! It has changed my life and I tell people that all the time, especially new members and those who may be interested in learning more about Toastmasters.

This year, I have been serving as an Area Governor, which means that I lend guidance and support to several clubs. I have to visit each club a couple of times a year and provide support and feedback as needed to help the members and the club grow.

I visited one of my clubs a few evenings ago and had a great experience. Whenever a Toastmaster leader visits a club, we are always asked to speak a few minutes. I noticed there were newer members and at least one guest. I chose to include in my introduction how much Toastmasters has helped me grow in confidence and courage, especially as a person who stutters.

To my amazement, two other people in the group also stutter. After I spoke, everyone else introduced themselves. One young man, a member for only a month, shared that he could relate with me. He said it was good to hear a Toastmaster leader talk about stuttering, as he also stutters.

And then, the guest at the meeting shared that he too stutters. He is from Copenhagen, Denmark and is here for a semester as an exchange student. He stuttered openly and shared that he too was happy to hear a Toastmaster leader openly acknowledge stuttering. He mentioned he had heard about Toastmasters through the [McGuire \(speech therapy\) program](#) he had taken in Denmark.

After the meeting, this young man said he felt comfortable and planned to join Toastmasters and then transfer his membership when he returned home to Denmark.

This made a great impact on me that night. I wondered if I had not shared about my stuttering in my introduction, would these two young men have shared? Maybe, maybe not. They might have felt no one could understand and might have felt they needed to keep it hidden.

I felt inspired that my choice to share personal information about my stuttering might have inspired those two young men to feel comfortable enough to disclose.

And what are the odds that 3 people who stutter would end up at the same Toastmasters meeting, totally unaware of the coincidence? Something tells me we were supposed to be there that evening to encourage and inspire each other!

What do you think?

What It Feels Like To Be Covert

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [March 22, 2012](#)

Like a swan graceful and elegant on the surface, but frantically thrashing and kicking below the surface to keep it looking that way.

Like I fell off a cliff in mid-sentence and no one even noticed.

Like observing life through a two way mirror seeing and hearing everything other people are doing and saying, but feeling unable to participate in the conversation.

Like playing a game of hide and seek and always being terrified that my hiding place would be discovered.

I gave a talk last week to master level SLP students. I was asked to talk about what it felt like to be covert.

I used some of these examples, and also talked about the shame involved with stuttering and trying to cover it up.

I don't think the SLP students got it. I don't think SLP students get enough information on what it's like to cover up stuttering.

Have you ever tried to cover up your stuttering? How did it feel?

I got some of these examples from some of my friends who share the covert experience.

Thank you!

[Do People Think Of You?](#)

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [April 11, 2012](#)

Many of us in the stuttering community were happy to see stuttering realistically portrayed on the television show [“What Would You Do?”](#) On the April 6, 2012 show, there was a segment about a teenage girl who stutters trying to simply order in a local ice cream shop.

Actors were hired to make fun of her, mimic and bully her while she was speaking. The premise was to see if ordinary, unsuspecting people would stand up and confront the bullies. You can [see what happened here](#).

This was one of the most realistic portrayals of stuttering in the media I have ever seen. Why? Because the young girl actually stutters. She wasn't acting. And the bullying she faced, along with rude remarks and general impatience, are faced by people who stutter every day.

It was refreshing to see ordinary people come to her defense, and confronting the people bullying the person who stutters.

My question today: how many friends of yours came up to you and said they saw the show and thought of you? Does that happen?

I had at least 5 people mention to me they had seen the show, and asked if I had. They said they thought of me while watching it.

Is it because I stutter that people I know automatically think of me when they see this stuff? Apparently yes!

At work yesterday, one woman said she thought of me when watching it Friday night. She asked if I had seen it and had something like that (bullying) ever happened to me. Two other women said they had missed it. So we put on the video and all watched it together.

I asked them, lightheartedly, “do you guys always think of me when you see or hear something about stuttering?” They said, “YES.” I said, “Why?” They said, “Because you are so open about it.”

They then asked me if anything like that had ever happened to me. I shared the time a few years ago when a deli clerk made fun of me when I couldn't say “ch-ch-ch-cheese.” The guy went on to say if I couldn't say cheese, I'd have to take chicken wings.

My friends were shocked and asked me how I had reacted. I said I felt humiliated and didn't do anything – left as quickly as I could and was in tears by the time I left the store. They said I

should have called the manager and complained. It's easier said than done. This happened with 3 people standing in line behind me. No one said anything or came to my defense. Anyway, does this ever happen to you? Friends see or read something about stuttering and they mention it to you? Or cut the article out of a magazine and give it to you?

The Blame Game

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [April 17, 2012](#)

Do you ever blame yourself for stuttering? Why do you suppose that is? Is it because of how other people react to us?

My stuttering is very variable. Sometimes my stuttering is hardly noticeable, other times it seems I stutter or block on every other word. I have had people comment to me something like, “do you know just now you didn’t stutter at all? How come you can’t do that all the time?”

I can’t do that all the time because it takes too much energy and time to think about breathing and light contact when I am ready to speak. I just speak, like everyone else. And sometimes my words don’t come out smoothly or at all for a moment (or few.)

What about stutterers who stutter severely – with struggle behavior and blocking on every word, all of the time? What do you think listeners think when listening? “Damn, they’re just lazy. If they worked on their speech, they wouldn’t sound like that.”

Does a listener listening to stuttering think we can turn it off and on with ease? Or does the listener think we could if we tried harder. You know, tried our “speech tools” or our “targets.” Practiced more, focused more, concentrated on being fluent.

A friend shared recently that he blames himself for stuttering. “Why?” I naturally asked. “People look at me and judge me and think I’m messed up because I stutter.” (he actually used a stronger word than “messed up”)

He thinks he could have, or should have, done something about “it” – and because he didn’t or couldn’t, it’s his fault that he stutters. He’s to blame!

He said, “people don’t look at people in a wheelchair and think if they tried harder, they could walk. But they do think that about stuttering – if I went to therapy, I wouldn’t stutter like this. It’s my fault. I blame myself for stuttering.”

Should we blame our selves for stuttering? Should blame even enter into conversations about stuttering?

What do you think?

Being Anonymous

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [May 10, 2012](#)

Many of us who stutter choose to be anonymous. We don't want anyone to know we stutter, so we do everything we can to keep our light from shining.

We don't want to draw attention to ourselves, so we figure out ways to hide, stay quiet, keep in the background. And it's not just with covert stutterers. Even people whose stutter is very obvious often try to remain anonymous when possible.

It's safer (we think.) If we don't get noticed, we don't expose ourselves to negative feedback. We shield our self from being made fun of, teased or excluded.

But we also fail to get noticed positively, because we often make that choice to be anonymous.

I find it very interesting as a blogger to see how many people comment on blogs as "anonymous" or with just their initials. Especially on stuttering blogs. People who stutter often don't want their name linked with anything related to stuttering. It seems to be fear based.

Fear of not getting a job. Fear of a girlfriend or boyfriend dumping you. Fear of not finding a girlfriend or boyfriend because you stutter.

Being anonymous also seems to give people a freedom to express themselves more honestly or critically, because they think it can't be traced back to them.

I heard someone say last week that we should try to look at the light, not the lampshade. But it's hard to do that when we're anonymous.

Thoughts?

Wounded Inner Child

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [May 14, 2012](#)

Sometimes I think about that sad, frightened little girl who stuttered and wish I could just give her a great big hug and tell her everything would be OK. If someone had told her that, things certainly would have been different.

She wouldn't have grown up feeling so insecure, afraid and ashamed. Insecurity, fear and shame stays with those who don't get early positive messages. How can we change that?

One of the earliest memories I have of stuttering is my father yelling at me to, "Stop that," "no one talks like that," or "Jesus Christ, shut up." I don't necessarily remember the stuttering, but I vividly remember how that criticism felt, stung!

I didn't know how to cope. I was afraid of my father and his deep disapproval. He was ashamed of me. He never said that. He didn't have to.

I wanted my father to love me and be proud of me. I never, ever felt I measured up in his eyes, not as that little girl and not as an adult.

Those feelings of hurt, of being a disappointment, and being disappointed, of not feeling loved, stayed with me a long time. Those early moments drove me to try and hide my stuttering.

I always tried to find that love and approval, which I didn't think I could as a stutterer.

As an adult, I often still feel the pain and loneliness of that wounded little girl. The shame that still creeps in sometimes when I stutter leads right back to my 5 year old's shame. I tell myself I am over it, but it comes back to remind me, haunt me, actually.

What can be done to ease the pain that is still there of the wounded inner child? Do you have a wounded inner child that you do not acknowledge, or tend to?

I try to be kind and gentle when she pops in unannounced! I wish I could give her that warm hug and tell her everything will be OK. I wish I could dry her tears and take the pain away.

The closest I can come is to try and embrace myself and remind myself that I am good and special and loved, just the way I am. Stuttering and all!

Can you do that?

[That Silent Space](#)

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [May 21, 2012](#)

Have you ever thought about ordinary people who are uncomfortable with silence during a conversation? I remember an English teacher talking about how it's important to pause while speaking and give people time to process what was said.

But she also said that many people can't bear a long silence and will rush to fill in that silent space. I certainly can recall this. I have heard people rush to fill in that silence with anything, even if it doesn't relate at all to what has been said.

I have been thinking about silence, specifically about that silent space we have when we have an unusually long pause or block.

I am usually panicking during that silent moment! Lots of thoughts have gone through my mind: "Oh no! Not again!" "Why now?" "She's going to think there's something wrong with me!" It's amazing how many thoughts can go through one's mind in a matter of seconds!

I have wondered what goes on in the mind of the fluent listener during that silent space? If they know us, are they aware we are stuttering? Are they giving us that space to stutter, and straining to not fill the space?

If they don't know us, what might they be thinking? I'm curious – but apprehensive to ask someone!

What about you? Is that a conversation worth having?

Even When Stuttering Is Safe

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [August 10, 2012](#)

Even when stuttering is safe and encouraged, and in the majority, some people still struggle with the social interaction. It may be because they never learned how to be social. They missed out on learning conversational skills because they feared judgment.

I was one of those people. I was ashamed of my stuttering, so I tried to hide it. Which meant that I rarely talked to people I didn't know. If someone approached me, my response was usually a head nod or one word answer.

I definitely was exposed to social interaction. As the oldest of 6 kids, there was constant competition among my siblings to be heard. That competition was intimidating for me as a stutterer, but I did get to see kids talk to each other and negotiate the back and forth of communication.

I may not have talked much, but I knew what to do.

I always wanted to be social, but I just wouldn't risk it. I didn't put myself into talking situations, whether safe or not.

Six years ago, I found stuttering self-help and Toastmasters, safe and supportive environments that felt comfortable. It took a while, and I hit some potholes, but I allowed myself to express myself, stutter and all. And I got better and better at it. And comfortable.

I am acutely aware of how many people who stutter are NOT comfortable in social situations. Even amongst other people who stutter. I recently returned from two stuttering conferences, where meeting other people who stutter, while stuttering, is encouraged and expected.

A lot of people never learned how to introduce themselves or join existing conversations or have the courage to join existing groups. Even among stutterers, it can still be intimidating.

I saw first timers at both recent conferences. At the large NSA conference, I noticed some people by themselves, on the fringes of conversations, clearly unsure how to break into established groups.

I also saw first-timers at the FRIENDS conference, which is much smaller. It appeared easier for new comers to break into established groups because they saw children do it. And at a smaller

conference, it is more obvious if you are sitting alone. Someone will draw you into a group and get you talking.

I've heard it said that you have to take some responsibility and initiative to introduce yourself at stuttering community events. But for those who never learned how, or are painfully shy (regardless of the stuttering,) it can be hugely intimidating.

I think it would be a good idea to have small group sessions at the stuttering conferences to discuss how to actually socialize in real-time, face to face with each other, and practice doing it.

What do you think?

Care and Feeding Of Stuttering

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [September 15, 2012](#)

I was asked this week during a meeting to introduce myself and tell my “story” to a new team I will be working with. The Director wanted to know our work and personal backgrounds, and essentially what makes us tick and our values.

I chose to include some discussion about my stuttering journey, as how I handle stuttering impacts just about everything I do.

Reflecting back on what I said in that discussion and some questions asked, here is my list of how you should care for and feed your stuttering.

1. If you stutter, stutter. Don't just say you stutter and then not stutter – you don't look credible then.
2. When talking about it, relax, maintain eye contact and smile. It really does engage listeners.
3. If someone asks a question, answer it honestly. I was asked, “I don't know much about stuttering, can you tell me a little more about it?” Do that!
4. Voluntary stutter periodically, especially if you are having a really fluent day. Sounds counter-intuitive, but that's part of caring for your stutter.
5. Be sure to feed your stuttering – don't be afraid of blocks or signs of tension. If you have disclosed, it will be expected. Your stuttering will eat that up and relax.
6. Acknowledge feelings you have about stuttering. Know that shame and fear of judgement still creep in from time to time. That's why it's so important to care for your stuttering by being good to it and not hiding it.
7. Don't spend precious time and energy trying not to stutter – it rarely works. It's more efficient to just stutter and move forward.
8. Thank others who take an interest and ask questions.
9. Thank your stuttering when it has a particularly good day. Say, “Thank you stuttering!”
10. Share these care and feeding tips with others – people who stutter or not. It gives your stuttering more confidence.

[5 Ways To Disclose Your Stuttering](#)

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [November 15, 2012](#)

1. If you are meeting someone new for the first time, and you are engaging in small talk that leads to sharing a little about yourself, consider mentioning that you stutter. An easy way is to say something like, “One of the really unique things about me is I stutter. If you don’t know much about stuttering, ask me, because I’m an expert.”

2. If you are doing a small or large group presentation to people you don’t know well, consider disclosing your stutter early on in your talk. Do it in such a way that you are very confident and matter-of-fact. Let people know that you are comfortable with it. You might say, “Oh, by the way, I stutter, so you may hear some repetitions or pauses. It’s nothing to worry about. I’m OK with my stuttering and I hope you will be too.”

3. Use humor. Try not to take yourself too seriously. If you find yourself talking with someone and you’re self-conscious of a stuttering moment, take some of the pressure off yourself. Consider saying something like, “I hate when that happens. My stuttering seems to be on autopilot today!” And then laugh! If your listener sees that you are comfortable enough to use humor, they will take the cue from you to be a comfortable listener. It’s also a good way to lessen any anxiety you may be feeling.

4. If someone makes fun of you – laughs, mimics, or says something hurtful – feel the “pain” for a moment and then say something. You might try, “maybe you didn’t realize it, but I stutter. This is how I talk. I didn’t like what you just said. Please don’t say it again.” Most people will feel bad and apologize. I always feel a little guilty when that happens, as I don’t purposely want to embarrass someone. But I find that many people really respect the courage it takes to address the fact that we were offended by their teasing or hurtful remark.

5. In a job interview, which most people who stutter think is highly stressful, consider mentioning stuttering as a strength. Yes, a strength! You can say, “I stutter, and because of that, I am an excellent listener, am always well prepared for any speaking engagement and I’m very compassionate, all valuable qualities in today’s workplace.”

Do you have any other ideas as to how to disclose your stuttering? Please share them – I’d love to hear your thoughts.

Stuttering Radar

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [December 19, 2012](#)

Whenever I hear someone else stutter, that I wasn't expecting, my stuttering radar kick in. What do I mean?

I was at a networking meeting on Thursday and a woman from a local agency was the main presenter. She stuttered. My ears picked it up right away and I felt my cheeks warm, as this surprised me. I am used to being the only one at these meetings who stutters.

And here was this woman talking and stuttering easily. She had no visible signs of tension or struggle. Her stuttering was in the form of hesitations and repetitions.

She was a very good speaker. She kept eye contact while talking and didn't seem bothered at all by her stuttering. Neither did any of the listeners. There was no visible reaction by any listeners. I know this, as I glanced around to see how people were responding. Everyone was respectfully listening and making appropriate eye contact with the speaker.

I was the only one who appeared to be taken with the fact that this woman was also a stutterer. Thoughts went through my mind: "Hey, I stutter too!" "You go girl." "Should I say something to her after?" Would that be appropriate? Would she be OK with that?

I decided not to react to her any differently than I would to any other speaker. After all, she was doing something I do all the time too. Speaking, presenting, sharing information that other people need and want.

As a stutterer, my radar kicks up a notch when I hear someone else stuttering. Perhaps it's just the novelty of, for once, not being the only one in the room who experiences less than perfect speech.

Can Stuttering Be Cute?

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [April 22, 2013](#)

My friend Burt from Belgium posed the question on one of the stuttering forums about how should one react when someone says our stuttering is cute. He wonders if people are just being nice by saying that.

Quite a few people weighed in with their comments and insights. Some say it's never happened. Some say people refer to stuttering as cute when they don't know what else to say. Some say they've heard stuttering said to be cute when the listener really feels sorry for the person stuttering.

One person indicated that she thinks that there are people out there that are genuinely attracted to flaws in people. I somewhat agree with that. I think when people let their true self shine – imperfections and all – they allow themselves to be vulnerable.

I am attracted to people who allow themselves to be vulnerable. To me, it signifies confidence. The person is confident enough to just be, and let the world see their true self.

I don't ever recall anyone saying my stuttering is/was cute, but I do remember a friend commenting a few years ago that he found my stuttering was beautiful. I remember being so floored with that, as I've always hated my stutter. How could anyone possibly find it to be beautiful?

When he said that, it made me feel really good. I've never forgotten it either. Now, looking back (and it's only been 4 or 5 years,) I think what may have been beautiful was the fact that I was being true to myself and stuttering openly and being vulnerable.

What do you think? Can stuttering be cute? Or attractive?

To Fear Or Not To Fear

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [May 9, 2013](#)

Stuttering requires a degree of fearlessness. In order to stutter openly, at some point, we have to lose the fear we have of being made fun of, or laughed at, or getting “the look.”

For most of us, letting go of that fear is hard to do. The fear of stuttering may indeed be more debilitating than the actual stuttering is.

I can well remember how worried I would always be of other people’s reactions if I stuttered. It goes back to childhood – of my father yelling at me when I stuttered, of the teacher who reprimanded me for stuttering, as if I was doing it purposely.

Those early experiences made the fear intensify. I feared the negative reactions more than the stuttering. The stuttering came and went. My perception that people thought there was something wrong with me stayed.

Fear drove me to hide my stuttering for a very long time. Even after “coming out” a few years ago, I still have moments where I try to hide it, or realize that I unintentionally hid it.

In one of the stuttering groups on Facebook, fear has been a recent topic. It never ceases to amaze me how many people are dealing with their “firsts” with stuttering. First time talking about stuttering openly, first time confronting emotions, namely fear.

These days, myself and other “stuttering veterans” are in a position to share our past experiences and hopefully help others with their first attempts at owning their feelings and fears.

It’s never easy. In fact, fear never really goes away, does it?

[Make Your Voice Heard](#)

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [May 16, 2013](#)

Today's post doesn't have a lot to do with stuttering. Or maybe it does in some way.

Yesterday I had a conversation with someone who challenged me to find a way to make my voice heard. That was hard to hear, as I like to think my voice is loud and clear.

I am open with my stuttering, and have a voice in that community. I let my voice be heard in the Toastmasters community and my voice is certainly heard through this blog and various social media platforms.

But this was not a challenge about my literal voice. He was pushing me to find a way to have my figurative voice be present in a tough environment with a lot of pushback. We talked about the different meanings of voice, which did not include stuttering at all.

For the first time in a long time, I am considering stepping away from a tough situation, instead of "shaking it off and stepping up." I've prided myself on doing that and encouraging others to do the same.

I mustered up the courage to say I think I need to bow out gracefully from a tough work situation. After much self talk, I had arrived at the decision that self-preservation and being happy was more important than the daily grind. That life is too short to be miserable every day.

But this individual would not let me off the hook! He pushed back and debated with me. He is convinced that I am supposed to be right in the thick of things and that my leadership and voice will strengthen and that I will be better for sticking it out. And that the work is important and worth it.

He challenged me to find new ways to collaborate, communicate and problem solve.

My insides are screaming that I've had enough, that as long as I can save face, it's OK to bow out and still stand tall.

But I'll admit I'm struck by this individual's confidence in me that I can stay the course and emerge better, stronger and with new skills.

Having your voice heard means being active, not passive, which I am trying to convince myself is OK at this stage in my life and career.

My white flag was not accepted. So I have to figure out how to raise my voice another octave. And do that with grace.

It's Personal

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [June 4, 2013](#)

I had one of those intimate stuttering moments today. You probably know what I mean.

I got caught in a block on the “k” in the word “keep” – came out something like “ki-ki-ki-ki-ki-ki-kiiiiii-eep.”

I say intimate in that I was looking at the person I was talking to as I blocked and we maintained eye contact through the block.

Neither of us averted our gaze. Our eyes just kind of locked, until I was able to finish the word and then move on. I then glanced away for a second and then glanced back, which I think is normal eye contact. The other person did too.

So why is this a big deal?

Well, stuttering can be very intimate. In a Google+ hangout recently, David, a co-founder of [Stutter Social](#), discussed his view of the “intimacy of stuttering.” It’s my view too.

Getting locked up in a block for a few seconds and sharing that with another person is very personal. I showed my “imperfection” in a vulnerable way.

And to have the other person share that with you, as in maintaining eye contact, until the block is over, is extremely personal.

I appreciated this person’s willingness to stay present with me, as she could have easily averted her eyes out of embarrassment or discomfort. Or even to give me a moment to “collect myself.”

Staying with me in the moment was also a deep sign of respect.

We shared that very personal moment that was important enough to me to write about this today.

What do you think? Can you relate?

[Good Stuttering Experience](#)

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [June 12, 2013](#)

I want to share a good stuttering experience I had this week.

On Saturday, I participated in a Block Party held in my community and represented the [National Stuttering Association](#) at an information table. It was a great day – the weather cooperated and it was warm, which brought a lot of people out.

I had many visitors to my table and delighted in being able to share information about stuttering, both to those who did not know much about it and to several who did.

One of the first visitors to my table was 6-year-old Charlie who stutters. He was with his uncle. We talked about stuttering and I gave the uncle some resource material. I gave Charlie a pin, a wrist band and a chinese finger trap, which illustrates what it's like to get stuck in a stuttering block.

By the end of our brief conversation, Charlie was stuttering like a rockstar and grinning from ear to ear.

I also met 9-year-old Taylor who also stutters. He shared with me the 3 ways he stutters – repetitions, stretches and blocks. He knew blocking very well and schooled me on it. He too left the table with a big grin.

Later in the day, the city mayor came over and introduced himself and we chatted a bit. The mayor shared that he had stuttered as a kid, which led him to be quiet. He said, “when you’re quiet, you don’t stutter.” He said his stuttering stopped when he was in his teens.

He also asked me if I knew the former mayor of another city near us, who stutters. I did and we talked about our admiration for his willingness to be vulnerable every day in his public speaking. He is no longer the mayor, but holds a different role in state government.

It was a great day to raise awareness and educate about stuttering. The two little guys who openly stuttered made my day!

Several years ago I would never have imagined that I could be out in public willingly talking about stuttering, while stuttering, just to educate others. I have grown so much in my journey.

I encourage all of you to take opportunities when you can to participate in community events and volunteer to be an ambassador for stuttering. You will reap the rewards, I promise you.

Humans Need Human Contact

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [June 15, 2013](#)

With all the social media platforms and other choices for electronic communication, there is no shortage of ways to find and communicate with people over the internet.

There are so many stuttering support groups, frankly they are hard to keep up with. But there is one on Facebook where large numbers of people who stutter gravitate.

The group is diverse – all ages, both genders, culturally and geographically dispersed. Yet, so many questions are asked – some casual, some deeply personal.

It seems that people who stutter from all walks of life are looking for connection, and I contend that connection cannot always be found with clicks behind a computer screen.

I think this 21st century group of young people who stutter who flock to these groups do so because there is no physical group to turn to.

Humans are human, and we need social interaction with each other – preferably face-to-face, at least on the telephone (or these days Skype.) We need to see and hear each other, read facial expressions and body language and feel that connection that comes from true interaction between two people.

I don't think the future of interaction lies solely with social media and internet texting. I think we have to challenge ourselves to go and talk with a fellow person who stutters, or pick up the phone. Relationships start and then grow into friendships when we see and talk with each other in real-time.

We mustn't lose sight of that.

When We Are Offended

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [July 26, 2013](#)

I participated in a discussion this week in one of the stuttering groups about how we react when we are offended. Specifically, someone started a thread about how thick-skinned we are when it comes to negative reactions to our stuttering.

We can't account for another person's ignorance, stupidity or callousness, but we have a choice as to how we act or react.

Do we get defensive, defiant or confrontational? Or do we take offensive remarks and behavior in stride and take an opportunity to educate folks about something they may know nothing about?

In that discussion, I shared that I "choose my battles" wisely. If a stranger mocks or laughs at me, and I'm likely not to see that person ever again, I probably will not say anything and just let it go.

But if someone I know makes fun of my speech, or someone I know I'll see again, then I may seize the opportunity to educate and raise awareness. But that does require a thick skin and right motive.

In the past, when someone has been rude or hurtful, I would get very upset, tear up and often be too embarrassed to say anything. As I've become more comfortable with my stuttering, I have found the courage to disclose that I stutter and that their comment or behavior offended me.

I try not to disclose just so that someone feels bad and apologizes profusely, but will admit on more than one occasion I didn't mind seeing the person squirm in embarrassment.

I remember the time when I was signing up for a new job and an administrative assistant laughed at me during conversation. At first, I didn't say anything, thinking I must have misunderstood. But when it happened a second time while I was still speaking, I knew I had to say something.

I told her I stutter, and she immediately looked embarrassed and apologized profusely. She even said she never would have reacted like she did had she known I stuttered. We finished our business and before I left, she apologized again. I believe I educated her that day about stuttering and she may have become just a bit more tolerant and patient.

How do you react when someone offends you, whether intentional or not?

Stuttering And Assertiveness

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [October 3, 2013](#)

A reader asked me if could write about assertiveness and offer some tips about how to be assertive while stuttering. Good topic, as we all might need gentle reminders about what being assertive really is.

Being assertive involves advocating for yourself in a way that is positive, proactive and respectful. It also means being clear, direct and honest.

It's not always easy to be assertive. We may have been raised with stereotypical beliefs that men need to be aggressive and that women need to take care of others first. Or we might fear creating conflict, being criticized or rejected. Self esteem has a lot to do with how assertive we are.

I've had experience with not always "practicing what I preach." I've encouraged individuals I've worked with for years to stand up and speak up for themselves. But it's not easy. It's a skill that takes practice. I still need to practice it.

It may be easier to scream at someone or swallow our feelings and not say anything, but being assertive is better because it respects you and others. It also helps us to stay calm and relaxed in stressful situations.

Stuttering openly can be stressful. We become vulnerable. Being comfortable and assertive and letting your needs be known can relieve stress.

Here are some tips for stuttering assertively:

Use "I" statements. Practice using "I" statements with someone you feel comfortable with. Saying "I stutter. I am OK with it and hope you are too" puts you comfortably in control of the communication encounter and gives your listener a cue as to how to react.

Maintain good eye contact. Practice maintaining eye contact while doing some voluntary stuttering. Maintaining eye contact is a sign of self-confidence.

Be brave enough to respond even when someone reacts negatively to your stuttering. If someone laughs or makes fun of your stuttering, consider saying something like, "hey, I stutter, and I really don't like it when someone laughs at me. It hurts my feelings." Consider practicing saying that with someone you trust.

Reframe negative thoughts into positive ones. When your mind says you can't do something because you stutter, turn that around into an opportunity for a challenge.

Being assertive means letting your voice be heard and seizing speaking opportunities. It also means being kind to yourself – if an attempt at being assertive doesn't work, don't swallow your feelings and revert to silence. Try again the very next time the opportunity presents itself.

[Don't Choose Silence](#)

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [October 22, 2013](#)

Today is International Stuttering Awareness Day, a day that recognizes the 1% of the global population that stutters or stammers.

Stuttering is a complicated speech disorder that involves so much more than what (or what does not) come out of our mouths. Stuttering is defined as the involuntary disruption of the normal flow of speech.

It can be characterized by sound repetitions, hesitations, prolongations and blocking, where no sound comes out when the speaker tries to speak. A person who stutters may also exhibit struggle behavior, such as tension or facial grimaces when trying to get their words out.

Stuttering also involves the feelings that go along with not being able to speak fluently. People who stutter often feel enormous shame, fear, guilt, and inadequacy. People who listen to those who stutter often don't know how to react – and may react negatively, such as roll their eyes, laugh, mock or mimic or walk away.

When those negative listener reactions happen, a person who stutters may feel humiliated or demoralized.

Very often, people who stutter will try to do everything they can to not stutter, because of poor social reactions and those complex feelings under the surface.

Sometimes, people will choose not to speak. They may avoid speaking situations purposely. They may feel they shouldn't burden others with how they sound or how long it takes for them to speak. They may feel so ashamed that they feel they don't deserve to speak.

I stutter and have for many years. I have experienced the complicated feelings of fear, shame and embarrassment. I have purposely avoided speaking situations and missed out on life opportunities. Fortunately, I don't do that anymore.

Don't you do that either. Whatever you do, don't choose silence. When we're silent, we are not connected and engaged with the world. Use your voice and make it be heard. Use speech tools if it helps you, and talk to other people who stutter.

But just don't choose silence. The world needs your voice.

Nobody's Perfect

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [December 18, 2013](#)

I have spent a lot of valuable time in my life trying to be perfect. About lots of things – I always tried to be perfect in school, never satisfied unless I had a perfect score on a test or essay.

I've tried to be perfect on work assignments – spending time doing things over and over to ensure perfection, often doing work tasks at home during my free time in order to achieve the perfection I thought I had to have.

And I spent a lot of time trying to be perfectly fluent with my speech. I would switch words, rehearse over and over and avoid speaking situations where I feared I would stutter and not be able to cover it up.

Finally, I've reached a point in my life where I've come to accept my imperfections and actually embrace them. My imperfections are what make me uniquely me. I know longer try so hard to be fluent – I am what I am and if people don't like it, that's their loss.

There's been a lot of talk in some of the Facebook stuttering groups about covert vs. overt stuttering. For me, covert always had to do with me thinking I had to be perfect. I've let that go, and openly stutter at work and socially. Nothing horrible has happened and people just accept me for who I am.

I'm glad that I have accepted me for who I am, because nobody's perfect in this world.

The Phone

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [January 21, 2014](#)

Ahhh, the phone. A simple electronic device designed to make our lives easier. But for people who stutter, the phone can be our nemesis.

Talking on the phone can be a struggle, even a nightmare for those who stutter. The time pressure and being unable to see our listener often adds to our anxiety, which in turn can increase our stuttering.

Over the years, I've had my hiccups with the phone. For a long stretch, I can remember never answering the phone. I would always let the call go to voice mail, and I would return the call when I was ready. For some reason, I was (and still am) more comfortable when I initiate the call.

I've had my times when I re-record a message I have to leave on someone's voice mail if I think there was a stuttered word in my message. And I've re-recorded my own personal greeting on my voice mail numerous times until I got it "perfect."

These days, on my voice mail, I allow a repetition so that I've left a cue to callers that I stutter.

At work, I often have to pitch in and answer the main phone lines in the office. For the most part, I am alright with it. I always say the same greeting and always stutter the same way when I say, "May I he-he-help you?" Usually, I'm fine with that. Sometimes I find myself wincing, wishing I could say it without stuttering.

I covered the phones for a bit on Friday. When I answered in my usual way, the caller immediately said "Hi Pam." I winced. I felt like she recognized my stuttering and therefore knew right away it was me.

Now, maybe that wasn't true at all. Maybe she just recognized my voice (although I don't think so, as I don't answer the phones often enough to have my voice recognized.) Whatever was the case, I felt uncomfortable and a little embarrassed. Which bothers me, because I shouldn't be feeling embarrassment anymore because of my stuttering. But I do.

What about you? Is the phone (still) difficult for you? Or have you found a way to just take it in stride?

[A Moment Of Courage](#)

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [February 26, 2014](#)

At a recent [Stutter Social](#) Hangout, I had the chance to witness a powerful moment of courage. It was two weeks ago, but the impact still resonates.

Real quick, a hangout is a virtual group video chat where up to 10 people can talk with each other about stuttering, or anything for that matter.

I host a Hangout every other Sunday, which lasts for 90 minutes. People are free to “come in” when they can, and stay as long as they wish. There are no time pressures.

As a host, I try to welcome people as they come in, and if they are new, facilitate introductions, just like we would at a real-time support group.

As we know, introductions can be very stressful for those of us who stutter. The pressure may be magnified for some because we use microphones and video.

A newcomer, Sydney, joined the hangout and during a lull, I welcomed her and asked her to introduce herself to the group of about 8.

Sydney found herself in a mighty, stubborn block as she attempted to say her name and where she was from. We could see her effort and struggle as she stopped and started several times. The darn block was digging in its heels. Sydney stayed with it, for several minutes, and maintained eye contact and a smile.

You could feel the energy of the 8 of us who waited for Sydney. That energy seemed to fuel Sydney as she stayed courageously in the moment and waited out the block and she told us her name and where she is from.

Sydney smiled, we all smiled and we carried on in conversation.

What a moment of courage! Maybe not to the average person who doesn’t stutter, but it was. A powerful moment of courage and self-truth.

It would have been so easy for Sydney to give in and not stay with it. But at that moment, Sydney showed the rest of us a quiet moment of grit, persistence and courage. And she won – not that darn block!

I was glad I was there to see it. Go Sydney!

(Author’s note: Sydney gave me permission to write about this and to use her name.)

Being Introduced As A Stutterer

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [March 26, 2014](#)

Last night at my [Toastmasters](#) meeting, I was surprised by how someone introduced me at the start of the meeting. I will also admit that I was a bit embarrassed.

I was scheduled to be the Toastmaster, or emcee, for the evening. Therefore, the club president had to introduce me. As the theme of the meeting was perseverance, he chose to tie perseverance into his introduction of me.

The president indicated that I was a person who epitomizes courage and perseverance, as it takes courage to be a person who stutters and a Toastmaster. He went on to say that I have risen through the ranks of Toastmasters and achieved the highest designation, that of Distinguished Toastmaster (DTM.) He asked people to take note of how I run the meeting, as I am a good role model for fellow members and guests.

He stated that it takes courage to stutter and embrace public speaking and that I am an inspiration to the club. He concluded that I am a hero to him.

When I stood up and proceeded to speak, I was aware that I was embarrassed. Both for the high praise and words of kindness, but also because he introduced me as a person who stutters. I don't remember ever getting an introduction like that in my eight years in Toastmasters.

I thanked him for his hearty introduction and remarked that I hoped I could live up to his lofty words.

I was embarrassed because someone else was advertising that I stutter to people who didn't know that about me. It's not that I'm embarrassed that I stutter, it's just that I wasn't expecting this type of introduction and I felt a bit taken aback.

On the plus side, though, I found that I allowed myself to stutter more freely throughout my remarks during the meeting and even did some voluntary stuttering.

What do you think? How would you have felt if someone had given a surprise introduction like that?

[From A Kid's Perspective](#)

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [May 30, 2014](#)

I had the wonderful opportunity two weeks ago to speak to 9th graders about my stuttering and how it has impacted my career. I really should say that I “took” the opportunity to speak about stuttering.

You see, I was invited to speak to the students about my career as part of their annual Career Day. Since it was on May 15th and during [National Stuttering Awareness Week](#), I felt I needed to weave my stuttering story into my talk. I find I can no longer talk about my career without also talking about stuttering.

I took a pretty big leap of faith that this would be OK and I faced stiff competition. The students were also going to be hearing from people who do cool things with science and who get to design video games for a living. One guy even brought a robot.

But I decided to talk about how my career has changed over the years and how being open about my stuttering has helped make me memorable.

Yep! I talked about being memorable and used stuttering as an example. I reminded the kids that we all have “something” – mine just happens to be stuttering. Being successful includes shifting whatever the something is that we maybe don't like and turning it into an asset. I shared how that mindset shift has helped me come to terms with my stuttering and “use” it in a way that people will remember.

It's important in job interviews to “stand out from the crowd” in some way. I have done that by openly disclosing that I stutter and by openly stuttering.

The kids were great. I had to do my presentation 6 times to 6 different groups, so I was tired by day's end, but the kids were engaging and asked lots of good questions. They were curious about stuttering. Some mentioned that they have a sibling or cousin who stutters. Their questions were thoughtful.

One girl came up to me after class and told me that she has a brother who stutters and she was very glad I had come in to talk to their class. She gave me a hug.

Another girl came up to me in a different class and gave me the below note. It brought tears to my eyes. I definitely believe I made the right decision to talk about stuttering that day. Any time you can go and talk to kids about stuttering, differences, tolerance and respect, do it. It makes a difference.

[Pay Attention To Shame](#)

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [June 23, 2014](#)

Last night in a [Stutter Social](#) hangout, a small group talked about shame and fear, and how both can still have a grip on us as adults who stutter. While stuttering may get easier as we mature, those pesky feelings can hold on and do a real number on us.

We were talking about the times when we as adults get laughed at or someone makes a joke about our stuttering. Three of us were participating in this discussion, and we all had examples of when this has happened.

One guy mentioned that when this happens, he feels like punching the person who is so insensitive. He gets all tight and angry, but doesn't actually act on the desire to lash out. He said he actually doesn't do anything but feels vulnerable and ashamed.

I mentioned that I sometimes feel ashamed as well, when someone laughs or teases and I don't do anything, for fear of drawing more attention to the matter.

We discussed how it's important to pay attention to this shame.

When we feel shame, it's usually a sign that we need to do something – take action – to rid ourselves of the shameful feelings.

I shared that when someone laughed at my stuttering recently and made a joke, I let it bother me for a few days. Then I decided to email her and let her know it bothered me. She apologized and explained she was unaware she had made me feel uncomfortable. I felt better after doing something and not just letting the feelings eat at me.

What do you think? Do feelings of shame ever creep in? What can you do to lessen those feelings?

[Building Confidence](#)

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [August 1, 2014](#)

I participated in a great conversation this week about ways to build confidence if you stutter. During a [Stutter Social](#) chat, a young person asked how some of us more “seasoned stutterers” deal with the anxiety of stuttering in certain speaking situations.

Some people shared their experiences from speech therapy, some shared from their perspective on acceptance and two of us talked a little about [Toastmasters](#).

The following are some of the ideas that we shared about building confidence. Maybe you’ve tried some of them. Maybe you’ve got a suggestion to add.

- Don’t obsess or rehearse before hand. That increases anxiety and decreases spontaneous conversation.
- Consider advertising and letting listeners know that you are a person who stutters.
- Try using voluntary stuttering to help you gain some control during the speaking situation.
- Seize opportunities to speak, such as Toastmasters clubs or other speaking forums. Practice helps reduce anxiety and build confidence.
- Remind yourself that you have as much right to be in that speaking situation as the next person, that your voice deserves to be heard.
- If someone interrupts you, calmly let them know you’re not finished speaking yet and then proceed to complete your thoughts, no matter how long it takes.

What do you think? Do you have anything to add?

[The Importance Of Control](#)

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [August 15, 2014](#)

I wrote a post on [Loss of Control](#) five years ago! And it still rings true today. I want to share parts of that post in today's blog post.

Probably one of the most helpless feelings a person can have is that feeling you get when you lose control when speaking. You probably know what I mean.

My stomach feels like its going to bottom out, my chest gets tight, and my heart starts to pound so hard it feels like everyone can hear it. And my face heats up, I feel a lump in my throat and then my eyes start to well up. If the feeling lasts longer than a few seconds, my eyes spill over.

I feel loss of control when I get embarrassed, because these reactions happen automatically and involuntarily. I also feel loss of control when I get angry, or sad. I always felt like I should be able to control my reactions to feelings. Almost all of the same physical reactions occur.

I used to feel I had some control over my stuttering. Fairly early, I began to know which words or sounds I might stutter on, and concentrated on switching words or doing the avoidance thing. That stopped working for me long ago.

I started feeling more in control when I dropped most of the covert stuttering and just let natural stuttering out. Since not fighting so hard to not stutter, I have felt pretty controlled with my easy, relaxed repetitions.

But sometimes my speech is messy. I can't predict stuttering moments like I used to be able to, and I feel more tension and lack of control.

I often feel helpless, especially when around someone new or who is impatient.

Even though I tell myself I don't care what others think, I still sometimes feel the sting of judgment and fear rejection.

What do you think? Do you feel out of control when you get really stuck in a stuttering moment? Does this feeling ever go away?

Finishing For Us

Posted by: [Pamela Mertz](#) on: [August 26, 2014](#)

How many times has this happened to you? You're in a conversation with someone, either someone you know well or someone unfamiliar. You're going along fine with what you are saying and then it hits – a big block.

You get stuck and nothing comes out. You feel helpless and the moment feels like an hour. Your mouth is open and nothing is happening. Or sound is coming out but not the word.

And then your listener tries to help and finishes the word or sentence for you. Maybe they even got it right.

Or maybe they get it wrong, and say something not even remotely close to what you were actually going to say.

How does this make you feel? What do you do?

When this has happened to me, sometimes I feel angry. Angry that the block has happened in the first place and that someone has seen what I look like when I get stuck. I imagine it looks awful, but I'm sure in reality it doesn't.

I also might feel angry if the listener has finished my word and they guessed wrong. I do one of two things: finish what I was going to say anyway and move on, or move on and pretend like nothing happened.

I don't like to do that – pretend nothing happened, because something did. I got stuck in a block and someone reacted to it.

I wish I had the guts to acknowledge my feelings when this happens but I often don't. I don't like to draw more attention to my stuttering.

What about you?

