

**UNDERSTANDING  
THE  
STUTTERING HEXAGON**

**By ALAN BADMINGTON**

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Alan Badmington

As you know, I began to stutter at a very young age, and at 19 years old, I took a very important decision in my life; one which was greatly influenced by the fact that I stuttered. I realized that someone who stuttered can take a reasonably sheltered passage through life by choosing to avoid social intercourse; seeking employment with limited speaking opportunities and restricting the occasions on which he/she engages in conversation. Simple, isn't it? – if you don't speak, you don't stutter.

Those options were open to me, but I decided that it was not the path I wished to tread. I felt I needed to meet the challenge, and so, I joined the Police Service.

In those days, the interview procedure was brief and uncomplicated – comprising of only a few questions (coupled with the usual character checks). Avoiding the problem words, I selected my responses very carefully, and was successful in gaining appointment. On reflection, I feel that the fact that my uncle had been the local magistrates' clerk for many years probably influenced the decision.

Today, the interview extends to two days and involves many group speaking situations. Had that been the case then, I would NOT have been selected. When it came to patrol duties, I just about managed to keep my head above water by various avoidance practices, such as drawing sketches for persons who requested directions. The crunch came when I had to give evidence in court for the very first time. I could not say the oath; I just could not get past the second word – SWEAR.

I still have vivid memories of climbing up into the witness box, placing my left hand on the bible, raising my right hand aloft and saying, "I ssssss, I

ssssss, I ssssss, I ssssss”. Nothing would come out of my mouth as I struggled to say a small passage that was such an integral part of my profession.

My eyes closed, my pulse rocketed, perspiration poured from every part of my body as I stood locked in combat with a simple five-letter word. (Ironically, had it been a four-letter word, I would probably not have experienced any difficulty). The court officials and the public looked on with sheer disbelief at what was happening. Well, at least, I can only conjecture at their reactions, because I had entered a state of unconsciousness, totally oblivious to everything around me.

Being a prolific writer of limericks, it was (perhaps) inevitable that I would later recount that incident in verse:

A policeman in court with a stutter  
While giving the oath cause a flutter  
He said, “I ssssssssssssssssssssssssswear” Then gave up in despair  
Not a single word more could he utter.

That was not the end of it – I then had to give the evidence. As I mentioned earlier, my whole life centered around avoidance and word substitution. But, I could not change the defendant’s name; I could not change the name of the road in which the offence occurred; the day and date could not be altered, and the defendant’s vehicle and registration number were not negotiable.

It was impossible, and I was subsequently transferred to office duties, away from the public contact that I so much needed.

It had reinforced my belief that I could not say certain words. Neither could I speak in front of others when the focus of attention was on me. These negative beliefs were being cemented – my behavior and personality were being adjusted to accommodate my stutter.

Yet, only a few hours earlier, I had stood in the very same courtroom, and given the very same evidence without too much difficulty. But the circumstances had been far, far different.

On that occasion, the courtroom had been empty and devoid of the audience that later congregated to witness my performance. I had been practicing my

spiel in advance of the real event and amply demonstrated to myself that my speech mechanics were not defective. That was little comfort when I later failed miserably under scrutiny.

One of my supervisors later wrote of me, “When this officer gives evidence in court he is an embarrassment to all”. That reinforced my belief that listeners became uncomfortable when I stuttered. He also reported (several years later), “The only reason he has not been considered for promotion is his speech impediment”. (And I still have copies of those reports).

While very young in service, I passed the national promotion examination and attained third place in the UK (or, rather, England and Wales). This qualified me for an accelerated promotion scheme at the prestigious National Police College, which would have propelled me up through the ranks. They would not accept me because of my stutter.

My belief was, therefore, that I would never be promoted within the Police Service. The point I am trying to make is that the experiences I had encountered were forming the beliefs about myself that I was to hold throughout my adult life.

A few years later, I completed a two weeks fluency course, where I became virtually fluent. Within weeks of leaving that controlled environment, I lost the fluency and reverted to my former stuttering behaviour. You see, there was no follow-up support. I did, in fact, return on a second occasion but, once again, the same thing happened. My belief was that I would never overcome my stutter.

In about 1977, there was another development in my life when I acquired an auditory feedback device called the Edinburgh Masker. This was a small electronic apparatus that blocked out the sound of my own voice by emitting an infernal buzzing sound every time I spoke.

It was simply horrific – just imagine a uniformed police officer wearing a throat microphone and a set of ear moulds, connected to a control box by lengths of wires and tubing concealed beneath his clothing and hair. Indeed, the original machine was equipped with what can only be described as a doctor’s stethoscope. This was aesthetically unacceptable and so I made arrangements to have the ear moulds manufactured locally.

The Edinburgh Masker worked on the principle that if you don't hear your own voice, then it will reduce your likelihood of stuttering. I became so reliant on the device and would not go anywhere without it. I changed my speech pattern to accommodate the masking sound – prolonging the words so that I kept the sound activated. It sounded unnatural, but it helped.

I developed the belief that I could not exist without the Masker and had an array of spare parts on hand in case of failure. I believed that I could not speak without difficulty if I heard my own voice, and became very aware of my own voice when I was not wearing the Masker.

It was, indeed, a monstrosity (in that I was subjected to a buzzing noise every time I spoke), and I was obliged to lip read if anyone chose to speak while I was talking. I wore it for 10/12/14 hours every day over a period of about 20 years, with frequent headaches and ear infections. But....without it, I could not have existed in my profession.

After several years, I persuaded my employers to allow me to return to operational duties. With the aid of the Masker I renewed the public contact that I had been denied for so many years. I gave evidence in court, dealt with incidents and even attempted a spot of lecturing. The latter was not really successful but at least the Edinburgh Masker allowed me to attempt it – previously, I would never have tried.

So my beliefs changed from “I can't speak in front of a group” to “When wearing the Masker I can speak in front of a group with a lesser degree of difficulty”. I enjoyed the way I felt after giving a lecture. I enjoyed the experience of speaking in front of people. My feelings about myself were much so much warmer and pleasing. I also wore the Masker socially and found that it gave me greater confidence in those circumstances.

I met dozens of people daily and expanded my comfort zones. My speech was better in some circumstances than others, but I was never fluent. I wore the Masker at all times – it had become my mechanical crutch. Without it, I could not have undertaken my role. I constantly lived with the threat that it might let me down, and - one day - it did in a big way.

Having developed my writing skills in order to compensate for my speech problems, I became editor of the Force newspaper. On one occasion I was invited to prepare a ‘This is Your Life’ book for a retiring Chief Constable. Wearing the Masker, I plucked up the courage to present it to him in front of

about 200 people. (I wasn't asked, I volunteered. I had written the script and I wanted the credit).

I spoke reasonably well for the first five minutes or so, stuttering moderately, but then disaster occurred. One of the wires became dislodged and the masking sound ceased. I could hear my voice. I had severe problems with the remainder of the presentation and when it was completed my clothing was drenched in perspiration. I felt crestfallen and devastated in front of such a distinguished audience.

Yet only a few minutes earlier (before the device had failed) I had managed to undertake the role of presenter, albeit not in the \*Michael Aspel mold. When the Masker had been working I believed I could speak reasonably well. I could not hear my own voice and I was detached from the occasion. However, once the masking sound had been removed, I experienced great difficulty and reverted to my old speech behaviors. But at least I had not avoided the situation.

On another occasion I played the part of Goldilocks in a \*\*pantomime that I had written for a Christmas party. I spoke with a female voice throughout and had no problem whatsoever. It was not Alan Badmington who was assertive but Goldilocks. It was acceptable for 'her' to speak loudly, and assertively, in front of a crowd - but not ME.

A senior officer who was present expressed the view that I should always talk with a high-pitched voice. I declined his suggestion but to this very day I am convinced that I could have gained promotion in the Policewomen's Department. I thoroughly enjoyed the Thespian experience – I was doing something totally alien to my normal behavior. I found it pleasurable holding the attention of an audience and it gave me a desire to perform in front of people.

The Masker continued to let me down in really important situations. Whilst I could chat reasonably well with my colleagues (when wearing the Masker), it would inevitably let me down at promotion board interviews and other important occasions. So much so that midway through one such interview, an irate Chief Constable terminated the proceedings and told me not to waste his time in the future.

He made it abundantly clear that he would never consider promoting me.

That reaffirmed my belief that I could never gain advancement because of my stutter.

I retired from the Police Service in 1993 and stopped wearing the Edinburgh Masker on a regular basis. I only wore it on special occasions but always kept it near the telephone at home. My speech deteriorated and my comfort zones became very narrow.

In 1996 I was involved in a car accident and found myself confined to home. I could not use the Masker because of whiplash injuries. I relinquished my role as adviser to a national television series and had virtually no contact with anyone apart from my immediate family. My speech hit rock bottom, my emotions and esteem were at a low ebb. I was in pain, would not answer the telephone, indulged in very limited social contact and had a great deal of time to dwell on my speech.

In May 2000, everything changed. My wife persuaded me, after much resistance, to undertake a fluency program.

It was at that time I first learned of the existence of John Harrison, one of the earliest members of the National Stuttering Project in the USA, as well as being its former Associate Director. That organization subsequently became known as the National Stuttering Association and John has been the editor of its newsletter, 'Letting Go', for many years.

John is no stranger to the problem that has affected many of us here today, having stuttered throughout his school years, college and well into adulthood. His involvement in a broad variety of personal growth programs, over three decades, gave him a unique insight into the nature and dynamics of stuttering, and today he is fully recovered. The observations he made during that period enabled him to master the problem himself.

Many of the views I shall be expressing here today, are advanced by John in his wonderfully informative book entitled 'How to conquer your fears of speaking before people'. I strongly recommend that you might consider acquiring a copy, or at least obtain sight of that publication. John and I have become great friends since our first meeting in California last August, and I know that I am speaking today with his total blessing.

A man is walking along the road when he encounters another man on his

hands and knees under a street lamp. Being a Good Samaritan, he stops and enquires if he can be of any assistance. “I’m looking for my car keys”, replies the gentleman as he scrambles about on the pavement. With that, the second man also gets down on all fours to assist with the search.

After about ten unsuccessful minutes, he enquires, “Have you any idea where you may have dropped them?” “Yes” responds the original man, “Over there amongst the trees”. Rather taken aback, the second man asks, “Well, why are you looking here then?” “Because this is where the light is” was the prompt response.

Now that story is not humorous (I’ve plenty of those to tell you in the bar later); it is intended to demonstrate just how the problem of stuttering has been approached, in many quarters, throughout the years.

“Where the light is”, meaning that area around the mouth; The articulators, the tongue, the vocal chords etc. (Those parts from which speech is emitted; those parts from which speech originates; and those parts upon which speech therapists/pathologists (and others) have tended to concentrate their efforts and attention. The area that appears to be the source of the problem.)

John Harrison understands stuttering not simply as a speech problem, but as a system involving the entire person – an interactive system that is composed of at least six essential components – physiological responses, behaviours, emotions, perceptions, beliefs and intentions.

In order to facilitate explanation of his paradigm (or model), John Harrison devised a six-sided diagram, which he refers to as the STUTTERING HEXAGON.

In the brief time at my disposal this afternoon, I shall attempt to explain his theories and, hopefully, demonstrate how they applied to my own personal recovery from stuttering after more than half a century.

I should mention that, in his own workshops, John generally takes some two days to cover this subject. I have just over an hour – so my efforts will be somewhat abbreviated. (But if anyone wishes to remain until Tuesday, I am sure I can oblige).

I think it might be a good idea if I show you a slide of the hexagon, so that you may have better understanding of what I am attempting to explain. (Reproduced as an Appendix to this transcript). Before someone questions

my ability to spell, I should explain that John has kindly allowed me to copy it directly from his book – hence the American spelling of ‘Behavior’. As you can see, it comprises six different components:

PHYSIOLOGICAL RESPONSES

PHYSICAL BEHAVIOURS

EMOTIONS

PERCEPTIONS

BELIEFS

INTENTIONS

Before I explain each component, I should mention that there is something very important about the system you are viewing. Each point (each component) is connected to, and brings influence to bear upon, every other component within the Stuttering Hexagon. None of these elements individually creates the speech problem; it is the way in which these elements instantly interact that brings to life the stuttering behavior.

For example, your EMOTIONS will affect your BEHAVIOURS, PERCEPTIONS, BELIEFS, INTENTIONS and PHYSIOLOGICAL RESPONSES.

Similarly, any change in your beliefs, emotions, etc will resonate at all parts of the hexagonal model. Very much like when a fly gets caught in a spider’s web and starts to struggle to release itself. Vibrations are felt at every point on that web and, similarly, whatever is happening in one part of the hexagon is felt by, and affects, the whole hexagon.

As my talk progresses, I hope to show you how merely attempting to work on your speech, in isolation, may not be sufficient to change your overall stuttering behaviour. You need to do so much more.

If you receive therapy, or attend a fluency course, you may see an improvement in your speech IN THAT ENVIRONMENT because, in addition to the various control techniques being implemented, your self-image, perceptions, beliefs and emotions are positively influenced by the relationship with the therapist.

But that is not enough, if you do not make efforts to address other matters relating to your life (such as the limited way you see yourself; your long-

held, self-defeating negative beliefs; your unwillingness to take risks, etc), the other points on the stuttering hexagon are likely to pull your speech back into balance with the rest of the system. Eventually, you will find yourself slipping back into the same old patterns.

Let us now take a more in-depth look at the individual components that make up the stuttering hexagon.

**PHYSIOLOGICAL RESPONSES** These are the physiological characteristics we inherit.

A statistically significant number of people within the stuttering community appear to show a higher level of sensitivity than persons who do not stutter. Thus, when the shop assistant has a look of impatience, or is abrupt, then we might be more liable to react.

Our bodies have been genetically programmed to initiate a fight-or-flight reaction whenever our physical survival is threatened. Your heartbeat increases, your blood pressure soars, blood rushes from your stomach towards your muscles as you prepare for the danger. You experience a stress reaction in order to meet the threat, but fear of talking is not generally a physical danger, as the body is being led to believe by these physiological changes.

It is a social danger, but your body cannot differentiate, therefore the physiological response is creating additional insecurity and discomfort. There is not a great deal you can do about the physiological system you were born with. However, by exercising control over the other parts of the hexagon, you can reduce the frequency with which you experience these fight-or-flight responses.

### **BEHAVIOURS**

There are specific behaviors that are counter productive to fluent speech – holding the breath, pursing the lips, locking the vocal chords, etc. I did all of these. If a person curtails these behaviors, or improves his or her technique, then fluency can be enhanced.

However, the speech block is not created solely by these physical behaviors. It occurs because of the individual's emotions, perceptions, beliefs, intentions, physiological responses and speech behaviors all being woven together into a patterned response. None of these elements singularly creates

the block – the block is created by the way in which these elements interact and reinforce each other.

## **EMOTIONS**

There are certain feelings that contribute to, or result from, our stuttering. You will all recognize them: FEAR, HURT, ANGER, FRUSTRATION, HELPLESSNESS, EMBARRASSMENT, SHAME AND VULNERABILITY.

Those of us who stutter have always tried to de-personalize the speaking experience because it was painful. We did not wish to feel the feelings any more than we had to. We avoided eye contact; we detached ourselves from the speaking situation; we retreated. That very attitude of holding back is what helps to create and perpetuate our speech blocks.

Often our ability to block out our feelings is so automatic that we fail to recognize that these feelings exist. When we stutter, there is a sense of panic and we are completely unconscious to what is occurring. We don't even realize that we are having feelings at that moment because we become totally oblivious, as I did in the courtroom.

Instead of suppressing these intense feelings, we must learn to experience them as they surface. Experience the fear; experience the panic – so that we can use them to energize our speech (in a similar manner to actors who use it to put oomph into their performance). What we must not do is to continue to block them out.

We need to understand the differences between creative and negative discomfort.

Negative discomfort is the kind that debilitates us. It is usually associated with holding back something that wants to be expressed. Creative discomfort, on the other hand, is experienced when you let go.

Transforming your discomfort into something positive - actually learning how to make it work for you – will be a major step in overcoming your fears. You will certainly experience creative/positive discomfort as you push out your comfort zones and attempt to change your old negative stuttering

behaviour. If you are not feeling that discomfort, then it is a sign that you are continuing to remain within your former narrow parameters.

Persons who have grown up with a stutter tend to be frightened of their own voice and do not enjoy the feeling of power when addressing an audience.

Possibly, we are afraid of coming on too strong – being too powerful? It is as though we feel obliged to compensate by toning ourselves down – pulling back.

## **PERCEPTIONS**

Perceptions are how we see and interpret things HERE AND NOW – not in the future.

If we feel that we are an oddity because of how we speak, then we perceive that the whispered comments of one person to another are about us. For example, if I had passed a group of unsavory individuals as I was entering the courtroom, and they started whispering, I might have perceived that they were talking about me – about my speech. Whereas, they were discussing how one of their number had seduced the inspector's daughter the previous weekend. In effect, their conduct had nothing at all to do with me.

If your hexagon is in the negative (in any of the component areas) then this can affect how you react to, or envisage, any situation. If you have been involved in a blazing row with your girlfriend, or wife (or both); or just had a bad speaking experience on the telephone, your emotions would be at a low ebb – thereby affecting your emotions (and, correspondingly, your perceptions) in a negative manner.

Persons who stutter tend to have a fixation that whatever happens in their lives is related to their speech. Their speech is uppermost in their minds at all times. They go to bed thinking about their speech – they wake up thinking about their speech. Speech, speech, speech – it consumes them. Our irrational thinking about our speech totally influences our perceptions.

Nearly every time I spoke, I perceived that I was being judged.

Quite frequently, our perceptions of others with respect to our stuttering, is completely without foundation. As a result, all too often we miss opportunities for intimacy, growth and pleasure, merely because we maintain the unfounded belief that our stuttering prohibits us from experiencing our own life. We hide further and further from those around us,

and we sink deeper and deeper into the mire of self-doubt, self-hatred and self-pity.

Persons who stutter may have not always been good at developing a self-image grounded in reality. Neither have they been able to define what is acceptable behaviour. Generally, many of us are too worried about coming on forcibly, and so we tend to hold back. In order to move forward, it is essential that we discover that we don't need to live our lives in such narrow comfort zones. We need to discover that the world actually likes us better when we let go, and what's more we would like (and know) ourselves better too.

### **BELIEFS**

Unlike perceptions, which can be easily modified by how we feel at a particular time, beliefs remain relatively constant. They are much more deep-rooted. I suppose they could be described as perceptions that have proven to be true over a period of time.

My beliefs about my speech came about in two different ways. Firstly, they were created by everything that happened to me; while secondly, they were developed through contact with authoritative figures (such as my parents, teachers, police colleagues etc). Indeed, they can be passed from grandfather to father to son.

I believed that I could not gain promotion because my speech would prove a hindrance. (My former Chief Constable certainly substantiated that belief for me).

I believed that I should avoid pausing at all costs. Once I managed to get started, I believed that I had to continue speaking while I enjoyed a degree of fluency.

We may believe that we shall never become effective speakers – I certainly held that belief until last year.

Many persons who stutter feel they are flawed because of their stutter. They believe that they have to please others and that they have to be perfect to be liked and accepted. That was true for me for as long as I can remember. I felt I had to compensate for my speech problem by excelling at everything I did (sport, report writing, appearance, punctuality etc) and performing a volume

of work far greater than my ‘fluent’ colleagues.

They also believe that the fears and panic they feel in front of others are unique to them; that ‘normal fluent’ people don’t experience such feelings when they have to stand and address a group.

(Surveys clearly indicate that this is not the case – public speaking is quoted as the number one fear of everyone. It is NOT unique to persons who stutter. When I joined speaking clubs last year, I found that there were several members who became extremely agitated prior to speaking).

Beliefs are the most powerful long-term influence on your hexagon and will be the last thing to change as you deal with the rest of the hexagon. In fact, I would say that beliefs are the beginning of the real change. Once you change your beliefs positively, you are well on the road to empowerment. Once beliefs are formed, we tend to shape our perceptions to fit those beliefs. In effect, our beliefs function like a pair of tinted sun glasses; they colour the way we see and experience life.

## **INTENTIONS**

Intentions are our motivations for acting in the manner in which we do. Frequently, our conscious intentions pull us in one direction, while our unconscious intentions pull us in the opposite direction.

In a speech block, for example, our apparent intention may be to speak the word, while our hidden intention may be to hold back out of fear of revealing ourselves and our imperfections to our listeners. When our intentions pull in opposite directions, we block and are unable to move.

You want to talk but, at the same time, you have feelings that threaten to push you beyond the threshold of what you are willing to experience. So you hold back – and for a while the forces are equally balanced. If this becomes your modus operandi (ie your usual method of speaking) in stressful situations, then it becomes your default - and you will routinely find yourself slipping into stuttering and blocking behaviour...but you cannot understand why.

None of the individual elements in the hexagon creates a speech block. It is the way in which these elements interact that creates the problem.

Let us now relate what we have learned about the Stuttering Hexagon to some of the speaking situations that I have experienced in my life. You may recall me telling you earlier about the courtroom scene that gave me so many problems.

The seeds of doubt were sown some weeks before the court appearance, when I learned that I would be required to give evidence. I must have rehearsed the oath a hundred times, when alone.

I knew the second word commenced with the feared letter 'S' (SWEAR), and that the oath also contained many other problematical letters.

Let us examine some of my beliefs:

Due to my previous difficulties with these letters, I believed that I would stutter and make a fool of myself.

I believed that I could not speak in front of an audience when I was the centre of attention.

I believed I could not say the oath, or my name.

I believed I would be judged by my performance (especially as a young officer on probation).

I believed the court would expect me to be perfect. My perceptions (at the time of being in court) were:

I'm performing in front of people who would not understand or be sympathetic to my problem.

The group of young men at the back of the court, who I had cause to deal with a couple of weeks earlier for public disorder, were talking about me and eagerly waiting for me to stutter.

If I made a fool of myself the news would quickly spread and I would become a laughing stock.

My physiological system was generating a fully-fledged fight or flight action. The body was pouring adrenaline into the blood stream, my blood pressure was rising etc.

My emotions were rooted in fear and terror. (After all, I had experienced severe problems during a mock court exercise, while attending a training course a few months earlier).

My intentions were that I should say the oath and then give the evidence. But my speech failed me.

I was being pulled by two opposing forces – the poles of divided intention. I wanted to say the oath, the situation demanded that I say the oath – but I was fearful of stuttering. I was fearful of revealing my secret, my deficiencies to everyone present. So I had a speech block.

Let us now retrace my steps to two hours earlier. I arrive at the court in advance of everyone else, with one colleague (a personal friend of mine) for the purpose of practicing my evidence. I walk the same path to the witness box, climb up into the same hallowed area, place my left hand on the same bible and recite, “I swear by Almighty God that the evidence I shall give, shall be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth”.

Absolutely perfect – shall I tell you why? All the elements – the negative emotions, perceptions, beliefs, intentions and physiological responses that characterized the real event, were not present. Instead there were positive forces.

I knew the other officer well and perceived him as a friend. I believed I could speak in front of him without too much difficulty. I knew it was not necessary to perform well to earn his high regard – he was not judging me. I knew that he was aware that I stuttered – so there was an absence of fear that my secret would be exposed. I knew there would not be any pomp and ceremony. I knew it didn't really matter if I stuttered – it was only an unimportant trial run.

The positive forces had reinforced each other to create a benign hexagon – one in which the need to hold back was not an issue. Thus I had little, if any, difficulty with the hitherto dreaded words when giving the oath and then continued to recite my evidence in a like manner. I knew that any hostile party would not challenge me.

As I was not holding back, I did not create the block. I was not fearful of

what I would expose when I spoke. WHAT A CONTRAST.

Let us also examine what happened at my wedding some years later. I knew from experience that when someone else spoke, or read, at the same time as myself I would, invariably, not encounter speaking difficulties. I made good use of this when it came time to say my wedding vows. In our pre-ceremony meetings with the vicar, we came to an arrangement whereby he would recite a line and then repeat it quietly when I was saying it.

What I didn't bargain for was my caring bride who, in order to ensure I didn't have any problems, also joined in saying my vows. So you can just imagine it – the vicar would say a line and then ALL THREE OF US would repeat it. Of course, mine was the loudest and most prominent voice – the other two merely whispered.

But I was aware of the support. No one else realized what we were doing and everything went perfectly.

Now let us examine that episode.

I believed I could speak when someone else spoke at the same time as myself as (in my eyes) I was not the center of attention. Like many persons who stutter, I felt uncomfortable hearing the sound of my own voice – associating it with all the shame and embarrassment I had experienced over the years.

With my wife and the vicar joining me, I was detached from my own speech and the negative emotional feelings were not present.

I perceived the vicar and my wife as friendly and supportive persons. Because I was relaxed about the situation, I did not experience the usual feelings of fear and panic (the physiological responses).

I intended to say the vows and I was not holding back. As there was no conflict (divided intentions), a speech block did not occur, thereby allowing the speech function to be completed.

Every component in the hexagon was positive, reacting positively with one another.

So there is another example of how the hexagon works. Having said that it went well, there are still a few things that concern me regarding that episode. I frequently lie awake at night, wrestling with the following questions: Am I married to my wife? Am I married to the vicar? Is my wife married to the vicar? or Are we all three joined in holy matrimony?

Contrast this with what happened a few hours later at the wedding reception. I rose to speak in front of the guests and had terrible problems. I said a few sentences, blocked and blocked again. It was so bad that one of my aunts intervened and started singing 'For he's a jolly good fellow'. Everyone joined in and I sat down a very disappointed and humiliated bridegroom. I was not disappointed with my new bride, I should quickly explain – but with my inability to complete the speech that I had rehearsed for weeks.

There was nothing organically wrong with my speech, but there were significant changes in my emotions, perceptions, beliefs, intentions, physiological responses and speech related struggles in the two environments.

Let us look at that painful episode in more detail. Unlike the situation in the church involving the vows, everything had changed.

I believed I could not speak in front of a large crowd and would make a fool of myself – and I did.

I believed that I could not speak while the focus of attention was on me. (I wasn't so much worried about any feared words because I had written the speech myself and carefully omitted any letters that normally presented difficulty).

I always spoke in short, sharp bursts and believed that I could not orate anything of a lengthy nature (even though it extended to only eight or ten lines).

I believed that most guests would be embarrassed when (not IF) I stuttered.

I perceived that many of those present would not understand my problem.

I perceived that those who knew I stuttered were waiting for me to slip up. I perceived that my wife and parents were anxious for me.

My physiological responses created the usual fight or flight reaction, with the accompanying body changes.

My emotions were totally immersed in fear, panic, vulnerability and embarrassment.

I was caught up in the speak/don't speak conflict. I wanted to continue speaking – it was the happiest day of my life. But I was fearful of stuttering – laying myself bare and revealing my speech difficulty to all present. This power struggle caused me to hold back and the inevitable speech blocks occurred.

Everything was negative – each component reacting negatively with each other to have such a detrimental effect on my speech behavior.

In May 2000, everything changed when my wife persuaded me to make one last effort to overcome my speech problem. I fought tooth and nail – but she is a very persuasive lady. I had suffered so much heartache in my life (as a result of failed therapies) that I vowed I would never again place myself in a situation where I might be exposed to such disappointment.

I had retired from the Police Service, so my speech was no longer an issue in respect of employment. In any case, I doubted that I could generate the enthusiasm, or even interest, and felt content in the limited comfort zones to which I had withdrawn following my car accident. At the time, I hardly wore my Edinburgh Masker and, in fact, had only minor social contact. I rarely left the comfort of my own home. If the telephone rang, I frequently ignored it.

My wife implored me to give it one last shot and so, with an incredible degree of skepticism I very begrudgingly agreed.

The program I joined deals with stuttering from a holistic perspective and it was while attending my first course, just 16 months ago, that I learned about John Harrison. John is not actively involved with the program, but he has very kindly allowed abbreviated versions of his workshops (devised to overcome the fear of public speaking) to be incorporated into the program. John doesn't run the workshops; his concepts and ideas are merely used by those attending.

So it was just sixteen months ago that I initially became aware of the

stuttering hexagon. And for the very first time in my life, I understood that whether or not I stuttered, depended very much on how I felt at any particular time. How a whole host of other factors affected my ability to speak.

I learned how to physically overcome speech blocks. I was given the tools to greatly reduce the likelihood of a speech block occurring – and also how to release a speech block should one occur. Armed with that, and many, many other valuable facets (including an understanding of the physiology and psychology of stuttering), I set out along the road to recovery.

By the second day of the four day course I was walking on air – I was speaking like I had never spoken before and I was enjoying it. I was talking in front of groups for the very first time in my life while not wearing the Edinburgh Masker. I could hear my own voice – it was initially disconcerting – but I liked what I heard.

When these four days ended I knew that the real challenge lay ahead. I had tasted fluency many years earlier (although never as manageable as now) but, previously, I had not been able to sustain it for any length of time outside the security and safety of a course environment. I felt this was different; I knew so much more about stuttering and myself and I knew that I had the life-long support of the program.

”Keep moving forward” and “Push out your comfort zones” were two of the many sayings I retained in my head. God knows, I had heard them enough in those four days. I knew that if I was to sustain the incredible gains I had attained, I needed to strictly adhere to this advice. So, using the new technique I had been taught, I immediately set out to dismantle the psychological framework that I had erected to support me during a lifetime of stuttering.

I had so many negative beliefs, negative perceptions, negative emotions and negative practices to eradicate. I knew that I had to create a fluency system in which my new speech behaviors, as well as emotions, perceptions, beliefs, intentions and psychological responses, all interactively supported each other.

I began placing myself in situations where I did things I would not previously have attempted. I knew that I had to face my fears, I needed to challenge the negative beliefs and feelings that I had developed (in many

cases unconsciously) over so many years and, above all, I resolved that I would never again practice avoidance. I would never again succumb to the temptation of substituting an easy word for a difficult word, and I promised myself that I would accept, and never avoid, the challenge of any speaking situation.

In effect, much of this had already commenced during the course when I participated in the Harrison workshops, which are principally designed to improve speaking in front of people - but also to demonstrate how to challenge and change certain life long traits.

This involved speaking in front of groups by using exaggerated techniques designed to help us 'let go'. They included such tasks as "projecting one's voice"; "maintaining eye contact"; "use of inordinately..... long.....pauses"; "speaking with feeling" and "adding music to one's voice". There were many others.

It was uncomfortable doing something I had always avoided but that was the purpose of the exercise. I was experiencing positive discomfort. You WILL feel uncomfortable on the first occasion, less uncomfortable on the second, and so on. Eventually, the discomfort will depart as that way of speaking begins to feel natural. It was great fun and I still engage in such workshops today. I am now at ease and find it enjoyable – I have lost my inhibitions.

This is the REAL me.

Your ability to tolerate short periods of discomfort is the key to change. If you are willing to take a chance, and hang on in there, you can bring about a significant shift in your attitude and self-image.

On my return home, I spent many hours speaking on the telephone with persons who had previously attended similar courses. Most were complete strangers – that made it a far greater challenge. My confidence was sky- high as I chatted, and I began to feel good about myself. If my new technique strayed, then I was quickly corrected.

In addition, I regularly attended support groups that had been set up and run by graduates of the program. Here again, I expanded my comfort zones and reinforced the speaking technique. Perhaps more importantly, I also reinforced my belief that my recovery was not temporary or fragile (as had

been the case on previous occasions).

Each day, I would spend lengthy periods on the telephone – speaking to businesses that I had selected from the Yellow Pages directory - making the most outrageous enquiries. All had free phone numbers – so that I did not incur any expenditure.

With each telephone call, the fear was reduced. I had demonstrated to myself that I could speak authoritatively during a lengthy telephone conversation to complete strangers. Of course I experienced fear, but I kept uppermost in my mind the words of American psychologist, Susan Jeffers – “Feel the fear and do it anyway”.

Throughout our marriage, my wife had always undertaken the task of making my appointments with the doctor, dentist etc – but now this was to change. A few days after my first course, I boldly marched into the doctors’ surgery. In front of a waiting crowd, I projected my voice and said, “Please may I have the prescription for Alan Badmington”.

On previous occasions, my wife would have collected it, or I would have produced my National Health card (or shown a piece of paper) that conspicuously bore my name. I am not saying that I wasn’t nervous, but I faced the fear, told myself that I could do it and reaped the reward. I have since repeated it on many occasions, thus reinforcing my positive beliefs.

Returning to the practice of writing my name on a piece of paper, I well recall the day (many years ago) when I took an item of clothing to the dry cleaners. I had omitted to carry my usual written note and when the assistant requested my name, I panicked and said, “Adrian Adams”. (I never had problems with vowels). This was all very well until my landlady kindly decided to do me a favor and collect that item a few days later. She duly gave my name as ‘Alan Badmington’ but, as we all know, it was not recorded under my correct identity. I had a lot of explaining to do.

Success followed success, and I could feel my whole self-image changing. I began to believe in myself; I did not have the negative feelings of self- doubt and this positivity created a chain reaction within my hexagon – resulting in a positive effect in my speech.

During my course, I had been encouraged to engage in conversation with

complete strangers in the street, and one day I spoke to nearly 300 people. I told many that I was a recovering stutterer and was amazed at the interest, and words of encouragement, that I received. Quite apart from the fact that I was accepting myself as a stutterer, I was also desensitising the situation. I began believing that I could speak to total strangers about my speech problem, (or any subject) and my negative perception that they would be embarrassed, or might ridicule me, was replaced with a positive perception.

Things took a dramatic change in August 2000 when I travelled to the USA to help set up the first American program. My role was to publicize the forthcoming event by telling my story. As I flew alone across the Atlantic to San Francisco, I wondered what I had let myself in for. Only three months earlier (after more than half a century of stuttering) I still had difficulty in saying my name. Yet now, I was thousands of miles from home and knew that I would be required to introduce myself to a multitude of strangers.

I literally knocked on the door of every newspaper office, radio station and TV studio in the corridor running from San Francisco to Northern Nevada. I went for two weeks and stayed for six weeks – what an adventure!

During that time I transformed my stuttering hexagon ten thousand fold. For fifty years it had been negative – that was now to change permanently. I did things I, hitherto, thought were impossible. You cannot imagine the immense satisfaction I gained from speaking to every section of the media. Before I move on, let me just take a few minutes to tell you, briefly, about how my hexagon had a massive positive boost early in the US adventure. Shortly after my arrival in San Francisco, I made the acquaintance of John Harrison for the first time. We hit it off straightaway and have become good friends.

John very kindly invited me out for a series of meals in the ‘City by the Bay’. Each time we dined, we talked and talked well into the early hours. Two things that John told me had such a positive influence upon my hexagon and, subsequently, my life.

When returning me to my place of residence one night, he suddenly said, “Alan, you’re a remarkable conversationalist and very inspirational”. You cannot imagine the effect that had upon me. For over 50 years, I had struggled to talk to people; I had been castigated for the manner in which I gave evidence in court; a Chief Constable had prematurely terminated a

Promotion Board interview because I was “wasting his time” – and I had failed miserably to give a speech at my wedding.

Yet now, this prominent person had paid me such a compliment. His comments took some time to sink in – I told him that I had never considered myself to possess either of those qualities. He reiterated his opinion.

Various components in my hexagon changed considerably that night:

I believed that persons enjoyed listening to me. I believed that I could inspire others. I believed I could speak well, and interestingly, for lengthy periods of time. I believed that others wanted to hear my opinions.

My previous long-held perception that persons were embarrassed when I spoke, moved from negative to positive.

My emotions took a distinct upturn; I was elated and overjoyed with my efforts.

My self-image was widening, and I liked the person I was becoming. I had so many positive experiences during my perambulations around California and Nevada – too numerous to mention.

However, let me recount one particular incident to further illustrate the hexagon in action.

I was visiting one of the major TV stations in San Francisco. Security within major cities is quite rigid and I was obliged to relate my story to the news desk via the house telephone. This was situated right in the heart of the busy public waiting area, where at least 25 to 30 persons were congregated. This was a stutterer’s worst nightmare – talking on the telephone before a listening audience.

Initially, I found this disconcerting but, as time progressed, I became less aware of those around me. When I completed the call, several members of the public approached me, expressed their interest in my recovery and wished me every success. (As it was obvious that everyone had heard my conversation, I felt justified in awarding myself full marks for voice projection).

There were many, many more occasions where I was obliged to use the

house phone in public areas, but I knew I could do it because I had done it before, and each time it became easier. Quite apart from increasing my self-belief, my perceptions of how the listening public would react changed dramatically. They were NOT embarrassed to hear my story and I gained in confidence. My emotions became positive and I spoke well.

Throughout my journey north to Nevada, I talked openly about my recovery in every situation. I engaged in conversation with complete strangers in restaurants; in the street; in motels; in casinos; in shops; in laundries – indeed, anywhere. The reactions I encountered were quite unbelievable; all were courteous and nearly everyone knew someone who stuttered.

I became totally desensitized and my perceptions and beliefs about what others thought in relation to my speech became so positive. Newspaper after newspaper carried my story and I was to undergo many radio and television interviews. My comfort zones continued to expand as well as my previous narrow self- image.

Following my return to the UK, I joined three speakers' clubs and now regularly give prepared and impromptu speeches. One experienced member, who was a public speaking tutor for more than 25 years, confided (on hearing me make my maiden speech) that he would never have suspected I had ever been troubled by a speech impediment. It is comments of this nature that help to change the narrow and negative way in which we have viewed ourselves for so long.

A few months ago, I engineered a 'chance' meeting with my former Chief Constable at the funeral of a colleague. I knew he would be present and purposely sought him out. I had experienced some harrowing moments while speaking to him in the past, and wanted to exorcise those ghosts.

He was wide-mouthed when he told me that he did not recognise me as the officer who had served under his command for so many years – and whom he would not promote under any circumstances.

Having achieved this, my hexagon rocketed with positivity, and it was not long before I embarked upon the next stage of dismantling my stuttering structure.

Live radio interview followed live radio interview (not just about stuttering

but also about other topics) as I pursued my relentless quest for recovery. I am not ashamed to admit that I regularly play over those tapes when I am in the car. Not for any egotistical reason but merely as a positive affirmation.

Since childhood, my stuttering had been fuelled by the pain and misery I encountered. For over half a century I constantly reminded myself of what I could NOT do, or the dire consequences of attempting to speak in certain situations.

I spent a lifetime accumulating, recounting and giving far too much prominence to the memories of bad speaking experiences – that is how my stutter developed and thrived. The more I nourished and sustained it – the more it took hold. I make no excuse for reversing that trait.

The worm has turned and I now constantly remind myself of the successes I enjoy. Never shirk from telling yourself how much you have achieved.

One radio interview lasted for 15 minutes (it was originally scheduled for 7 minutes but I just kept talking and talking). My eyes never fail to water when, at its conclusion, the interviewer comments, “Wasn’t that an inspirational chat. Alan, a stutterer and stammerer for over fifty years -and now you’d never know”. That certainly keeps my hexagon positive.

It received a further boost, a short while ago, when a police newsletter (which is circulated to all retired police personnel within my former force) carried an article about my recovery. It said, “You will all remember Alan when he served in the Constabulary. He suffered from a stammer that was a big obstacle to him during his police service and, more or less, confined him to administrative duties which prevented his promotion”.

Referring to the first of my many interviews on BBC Radio Wales, the item continued, “It was amazing to hear Alan speaking with such confidence and without any trace of his stammer”.

Nothing will ever make amends for the heartache and catalogue of lost opportunities that tainted my police career but, at least, my former colleagues will now view me in an entirely different light. My beliefs, perceptions, emotions and speech are now so positive. (I should mention that the article was not of my own initiation but resulted from someone hearing the radio broadcast).

During the past few months, I have further expanded my comfort zones by undertaking a series of lectures at Arkansas State University. The Professor of Speech and Language Disorders thought it would be useful if I gave her classes of future Speech and Language Pathologists an insight into my lifetime of stuttering. (Quite astonishingly, I understand that ASHA – the regulatory body in the USA – does not require SLPs to have contact with persons who stutter, prior to graduation).

After the final presentation I was given a birthday cake to celebrate the first anniversary of the commencement of my recovery, together with a model turtle – the significance of which is that a turtle can only move forward if it pushes its neck out. The Professor suggested that I had certainly pushed my neck out during the preceding twelve months.

During my life, as I suffered the social consequences of malfunctioning speech, I changed the way I felt about myself, and others. I developed social strategies to protect myself from shame and embarrassment. I also developed strategies for pushing out, or hiding, difficult words. When these changes began to influence and reinforce each other, the problem became self-perpetuating.

All these adjustments were made to support my stuttering habit. I knew that if I did not change the components in this system, the same system would have sat around waiting for the missing component (my stutter) to reappear. I was not prepared to allow that to happen.

So every day (even now) I still set myself new goals as I continue to etch – erode - the negativity that influenced my life, and my speech, for so long. I am determined that my old stuttering behaviour will never return. I am showing myself differently to the world and I love the way it is reacting differently to me.

My program recognizes that changing personal defaults in a number of areas does not occur overnight, and allows graduates to return on as many occasions as they wish. I have now completed nine courses. I didn't need to go back as many times as that; I had attained such a remarkable degree of fluency after the initial course. However, I chose to return because I wished to reinforce, and utilize, my speech in a variety of situations. During that time I have become empowered by coaching others, in addition to

maintaining my own recovery.

As a person who stuttered, I built up a self-image of who I was. Anything that challenged that image, I perceived as a threat to my well-being. A self-image that is too narrow and constrictive to accommodate our entire personality, imprisons us. It forces us to curtail our activities so that we may continue to act out of character. Persons who stutter avoid expanding their comfort zones.

Many continue to live their lives doing things with which they feel comfortable. We cast ourselves in a diminished role and are content to remain in the same old safe predictable world – maintaining the status quo.

On the other hand, if we can broaden this self-image to accommodate the different sides of ourselves, then we are able to play all these roles, and be comfortable in doing so. The moment you are willing to give up your old self-image, you will find that there are incredible opportunities for change. Unless you change you will fight the new you because it does not fit into how you see yourself.

In order to achieve this, you need to do certain things over and over until these behaviors become familiar and you get used to seeing yourself in these new roles. Only then will they become a welcome and acceptable part of the ‘real’ you. Until permanent changes occur – through continual expansion – the hexagon will remain vulnerable.

In his book, John Harrison says that he made his stuttering disappear long before his actual blocking behaviors ceased. He did this by observing what he was doing in a different light. He says, and I quote, “When I stopped observing my problem through the narrow perspective of stuttering; the stuttering per se was gone. That is, I stopped seeing the behavior as something called stuttering – and in its place was a handful of other problems in a unique relationship that needed to be addressed. By addressing these issues, individually, the actual physical blocking behaviors slowly diminished and disappeared over time”.

If you do not do anything about your posture of helplessness; or your reluctance to communicate your feelings; or your lack of self-assertiveness; or your constant need for the approval of others – then the old stuttering habits will return.

Stutterers have a fear of being different – of looking strange. We are obsessed with our desire to be like other people. We are obsessed with wanting others to be comfortable with us. We are obsessed with the need to belong.

In order not to risk upsetting others, we constantly modify and adjust ourselves until we present an image that THEY like, because we believe that pleasing people was the only choice we had. The reality is that in changing ourselves to please others, we lose contact with our real selves.

As stutterers, we seem to be overly introspective. We focus inwardly; we relive every speaking situation a hundred times in our minds before we speak. That is what I did for more than 50 years – but, thankfully, it is a thing of the past.

Now, I acknowledge negative thoughts (I don't block them out any more) but I have learned not to dwell upon them. I focus on what I want to do – I create an image of how I want the experience to be. If I feel like I am going to block, then I use my new tools to release the block. The debilitating oral shackles that inhibited me for so long have finally been removed.

I am not suggesting that everyone can make his or her speech blocks totally disappear. However, by correctly recognizing the nature of the problem, it is possible to maximise whatever efforts are made to improve one's ability to speak.

But let me give you a word of warning. All dynamic systems, from the atom to the largest galaxy have a built-in resistance to change. People fail to realise that a behavioural pattern – not just stuttering – has a life of its own. When threatened, the habit struggles to survive, much as we would do if we were threatened with annihilation.

We want to live – so does your stutter. After all, it is nearly old as you (and, in my case – that's quite an age). This resistance is one of the reasons why stuttering is such a hard nut to crack.

There are so many other issues I would like to have dealt with this afternoon, such as:

1. How research into stuttering has suffered over the years because of the

narrow paradigm that has been applied to it.

2. Why it is most unhelpful that the term ‘stuttering’ is used to encompass so many diverse types of dysfluency.

3. Why stuttering cannot be solved like a mathematical problem, where the subject matter continues to exist in a different form.

Sadly, time is not on my side – but perhaps I may have the opportunity to enlarge upon this on some future occasion.

I now realize that, although I was not aware of John Harrison’s concepts until last year, I had made considerable changes in my own personal stuttering hexagon over the years – aided, of course, by the Edinburgh Masker. Despite the setbacks, I had already set up a system that would support greater fluency and fuller self-expression. I recognize that I owe an immense debt of gratitude to the McGuire Program for providing the final piece of the jigsaw and, like a laser beam, all my energies are now moving in the same direction.

There has been, and will continue to be, discussion as to whether stuttering is a genetic or psychological problem. That is not the remit of my presentation here today. I came to tell you that I strongly believe that stuttering is not merely associated with the mechanics of speech. I hope that during this past hour or so, I have demonstrated my reasons for claiming that, “Stuttering is not just a speech problem”.