

The Great Benefits of Stuttering on Purpose

By Geoff Johnston

Stuttering on Purpose

Stuttering on Purpose?

You must be crazy!

Geoff's getting senile in his old age!

Why would I ever do something that I've been trying to avoid all of my life!

Many of us have spent our lives trying very hard to be fluent, to NOT stutter! Has it worked for you? If yes, well done and good luck to you. However, I suspect for the rest of us, it has failed dismally! If this is true for you, please read on.

The psychological model System Theory tells us that if we zero in on our ultimate goal (ie fluency) we can in fact make things worse because we deny the complexity (feelings, emotions, thinking processes, and context) in which stuttering arises; e.g. you can't pursue happiness directly but rather we do things that may result in happiness long-term.

The old saying that “only a fool continues to do what one has always done and expects a different result” is true with our stuttering behaviour. If what you’ve been doing isn’t moving you forward to your satisfaction why not take a risk and do something different?

There are many things you could try but the topic of this article is about voluntary stuttering or deliberate dysfluency as we call it on the McGuire Programme. I personally prefer to call it “fun stuttering” because it defines the attitude we must apply to the strategy; i.e. have some fun with it.

Voluntary stuttering is not new. In fact it’s been around since the early 1950’s with Joseph Sheehan and Charles Van Riper. I put to you however, that the psychology behind it is still valid today.

A good part of the reason we stutter is “holding back” behaviour, being torn between the desire to express ourselves freely and the fear that if we try to do that we’ll stutter and be perceived by others as abnormal, incompetent, disabled, whatever.

We spend our lives pretending, trying to present ourselves to the world as fluent speakers. Whether we like it or not, by doing that we’re not being true to ourselves.

We aren’t fluent speakers.

We’re people who stutter and assertive acceptance of that fact will release us from the anxieties that get in our way of

improving our speech.

Please note that I'm not saying we just accept that we stutter and give up trying to do anything about it.

I'm saying that at this point in our lives we do stutter for complex reasons of which anxiety plays a part but we may have an action plan to change that over time.

Denial and avoidance are the things that fuel and perpetuate the stuttering behaviour.

By not being true to ourselves as a person who stutters, we create confusion within ourselves and hence the holding back of emotions and our speech leading to stuttering.

The fear that we might stutter and make fools of ourselves is always there.

How then can we release ourselves from the fear of stuttering, the denial, the avoidance?

How can we project to the world the true person?

How can we unmask ourselves and look the world squarely in the eye rather than dropping our gaze and avoiding eye contact?

By doing the thing we most fear. By stuttering on purpose, the main difference being that we control the stutter rather than allowing it to control us! To overcome any phobia, and I believe that stuttering is essentially a social phobia, we need to face our fear and do exactly what we're afraid of. We need

to “kiss the dragon” if you like.

Stuttering on purpose achieves a number of benefits including being in control of our speech and desensitizing ourselves to the reactions of people when we do stutter.

Are you game enough to give it a go? If you are, I promise you it will be one of the bravest things you’ve ever done. The benefits though are enormous and will show you that controlling your fear and anxiety around speaking situations is achievable.

HOWEVER, it must be done correctly with the following technique:

To voluntary stutter by just r-r-r-repeating the first sound with almost certainly result in a real uncontrolled block. The technique is to say the first sound of the word assertively, then release all your air, pause for around two seconds, then take a big breath and say the entire word assertively.

By P ... release ... pause ... big breath ... practicing this form of V... release ... pause ... big breath ... voluntary stuttering with a great smile on your face you show your listener that you’re very much in control.

Drop a couple of those at the start of a feared conversation and the fear will drain away. You’ve “disclosed” right up front that you have a speech problem so there’s no need to try to hide it anymore. You can then be your true self! The emotional release is enormous.

Just who are we doing this for? Not our listener. We’re doing it for ourselves. Giving ourselves permission to be who we

are!

Another method of voluntary stuttering is called the slide or long hit and hold. This method involves sssssssaying the first sound of a word and holding that sound for say wwwun second and then fffffffinish the word. It must be done assertively with “attitude”.

It's not a method I personally favor or use because I think it's not overt enough. The success of voluntary stuttering is all about disclosing and demonstrating to your listener that YOU AREN'T a fluent speaker so then you can stop trying to be one.

McGuiries world-wide via our email discussion group arrange several times a year to have a DD Day. People contract with each other to do 1,000 deliberate dysfluencies within a nominated 24 hour period. People who achieve the goal feel bullet-proof for weeks after!

So there it is...a short description of voluntary stuttering. Are you game enough to give it a go? And not just once or twice. Like any skill you need to practice it to be able to use it effectively.

Above all, choose to be in control and have some FUN with it!

Geoff Johnston
Regional Director of McGuire Programme in Australia

WHAT WORKS, WHAT DOESN'T

This article contains some random thoughts about what I have found helpful in improving our speech and what hasn't. My opinions are based on observations of myself and other people who stutter particularly during the last 12 years working with over 1,000 such people on the McGuire Programme.

If you want to get good at anything...a sport, playing music, business, career, etc. you would do well to find someone who has excelled at that particular vocation, find out what they did and follow that example with the same attitude and persistence and it is likely you'll get similar results.

How brave the person is and their attitude and motivation to change will determine their level of permanent success.

I want to run through a list of strategies that have worked for people in the hope that even one or two may help you.

WHAT WORKS?

- They take ownership of the problem and are committed to work hard with courage and persistence. They are not victims waiting for someone or something to cure them! They set goals and GO FOR IT!
- They completely and assertively accept themselves as a person who stutters (PWS). That is they don't accept

themselves as a PWS forever but at this time a PWS who is working hard to become an effective communicator.

- Assertive self-acceptance is an active task requiring the person to be open about their stuttering, to disclose that they have a stutter and to demonstrate they have a stutter by stuttering on purpose in a relaxed manner, great eye contact and a smile. Lack of assertive self-acceptance, trying to hide the stutter and trying to be fluent are the main causes of turbulence and relapse after initial treatment! Rule: If you go into a speaking situation and you're afraid you might stutter that's exactly what you must do! Under your control NOT out of control! Real case: I went out on a contacts session with coach Cliff on the weekend and we worked on our voluntary stutters (VSs). I managed 250 VSs. It's amazing how your fear of stuttering completely fades away.
- They research and engage a treatment strategy that suits their objectives and personality.
- They learn a speaking technique in an intensive environment that will give them an initial boost of self-confidence, self-esteem and the courage for the battle ahead.
- They drill and practise that technique making it their speaking pattern of choice at least in the short to medium term in ALL situations. It becomes natural, second nature. You have to think about the technique less and less
- They refuse to entertain negative thoughts around speaking situations choosing instead to focus on past successes and the feelings that flow from those experiences.
- They learn to control their fear and anxiety by controlling their thoughts rather than allowing their thoughts to control

them. If they suffer from Stuttered Speech Syndrome (refer www.stutteredspeechsyndrome.com), that is unreasonable social anxiety in speaking situations, they seek treatment options such as CBT to supplement their treatment.

- They realise to be successful they need to change their speaking world and the meaning they give to speaking situations so adopting the appropriate ego state when communicating to people.
- They embrace every speaking situation and go out of their way to create new speaking situations. For example, if they're afraid of public speaking they join Toastmasters.
- They display great courage.
- They expand their comfort zone to the nth degree with NO avoidance. Avoidance fuels the fear and anxiety that maintains the stuttering mentality. eg Real case: Melbourne graduates setting a challenge to speak to over 300 strangers on an organised "contact day".
- They join a support group or self-help group that provides ongoing coaching and support. We cannot do this alone! However, support groups for people who stutter lack ambition...what we should be setting up is support groups to help people OUT of stuttering!
- They live by their intentions rather than their own or someone else's expectations.
- Over time they change their perceptions and beliefs about their speaking personality.

WHAT DOESN'T WORK?

- Trying to be fluent – fluency should be the end result of life changes, shifts in attitudes and changes in the system which is you, NOT as the main focus. Measurements such as stuttered syllables per minute focus on fluent speech which in my opinion re-enforces “trying to be fluent”.
- Attending a treatment option because mum, dad or your partner wanted you to. Lack of ownership and personal responsibility.
- Negative attitudes – thinking why this won't work for you rather than looking for reasons why it will!
- Using tricks and avoidance to try to hide our stuttering – a life of fear and anxiety awaits!
- Looking at stuttering as a problem which can be “fixed” rather than understanding changes in your speech will follow changes in you!
- Thinking a technique will cure you. Technique is 10% of the solution. How you use it and what you do with it in the real world is the other 90%!
- After an initial period of consolidation, not going for free expression, with your technique only a tool to be used as and when required. Initially we have to control the stutter to have positive experiences in talking situations. There will come a time when you can go for “fluency” but when fear and anxiety exists or turbulence hits, we have the well practiced tools to “change gears”, and cope with the situation.
- Being “people pleasers” putting the needs of others always ahead of ours, agreeing, being door mats, being passive. In the book “The Disease to Please” by Harriet Braiker the author believes the people pleasing trait, even though it sounds nice and sweet, is a serious

psychological co-dependency condition. People pleasing is often a trait of PWS negatively affecting our self-esteem, self-confidence and our ability to communicate effectively.

Effective treatment therefore requires the PWS to be empowered to take ownership of their own recovery but then access resources such as the McGuire Programme, speech pathologists, psychologists, life coaches, social workers, self-development programmes and other self-development activities by attending courses, reading, listening to CDs, etc.

Our stuttering does not define who we are. It is just a negative behaviour resulting from our reaction to events in our world either current or in the past. Recent studies have shown that the brain has great plasticity and the ability to change patterns from the past is very achievable.

Is stuttering genetic, physiological, neurological or psychological? To be honest I don't much care. I do know that the goal of effective communication can be attained by brave and persistent work and that recovery is a reality for many, many people. Knowing the root cause of something doesn't mean that it will solve the puzzle. It is far more effective to look at the decisions that one makes RIGHT NOW TODAY as they will affect one's future and quality of life.