

Being Your Own Best Advocate

To advocate is to “support or promote the interests of another”. Being your **own** best advocate is an important practice that helps to build confidence while promoting understanding and acceptance for yourself and stuttering in everyday life. A great way to advocate is to “advertise”.

Advertising your stuttering is as simple as letting someone know that you are a person who stutters. It is a great opportunity to educate and spread awareness, while also offering other personal benefits.

Here are the top 5 reasons why advertising is an important tool for effective communication, through the eyes of 20-Something Committee member, Cameron Francek:

5. Leave no room for interpretation.

When I am speaking with someone, no matter who, I prefer for them to know why it is that I may be disfluent. Too many times I've been asked if I "forgot my name", told to "relax" or stared at in wonder. I refuse to allow my listeners to make their own conclusions based on what could be very narrow knowledge of stuttering. By advertising that I am a "*person* who stutters" it allows both myself and my listener to focus on the content of our conversation, and not the way I am delivering my message.

4. Reduce the pressure of expectation.

Based on numbers alone, people expect people to be fluent. If somehow they can predict I am one of the 1% of people who stutter, I will be immediately inviting/dragging them to the casino. By advertising, I don't feel the need to hide the fact that I stutter for the rest of our interaction or relationship. In turn, I've found that not only can I more effectively use the tools I've practiced in speech therapy (voluntary stuttering, bouncing, easy onset, etc.), but operating without the pressure and stress of expectation, my fluency almost always increases.

3. I am a *person* who stutters.

I have been fortunate to meet and become friends with a large number of people who stutter. I have met doctors, lawyers, actors, speech-language pathologists and athletes who stutter; all people who have achieved great things. There's so much more to all of us who stutter, more to everyone regardless of what challenges they bear.

I graduated from Michigan State, I have a job, I have a great family and great friends, I love the gym, I've run a marathon, I'm loyal, I like to cook, play golf and I stutter. I trust that those who matter will appreciate me for the person I am, regardless of that last little detail. *You should too.*

2. Stuttering is OK.

There is no law which states that stuttering is not okay, or that a challenging day with fluency is punishable. It is okay if I take a little longer to order or if I stutter throughout introducing myself. It is even ok to stutter on the phone at a job. We all have our challenges, it just so happens that people are able to see and hear mine. I've worked hard to be able to control my speech, but if I stutter (which I do a lot) and I'm doing my best, I'm not going to apologize for who I am. Instead, I'll smile, advertise and reaffirm to myself that stuttering is okay.

1. It is my voice, and it is beautiful.

We are all different; we all talk differently, look different from one another and believe in different things. It is what makes us human. Our differences should be **celebrated**, not hidden. I was given my voice for a reason, and no one can take that away from me. I advertise because I am a person who stutters, it is my voice and it is beautiful.

So is yours.