

NATIONAL STUTTERING ASSOCIATION

IF YOU *stutter*, YOU ARE NOT *alone*.



Wednesday, April 28, 2021

Public Speaking at Work for People Who Stutter

Public speaking is one of the most common fears people experience. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, public speaking anxiety affects about 73% of the population. People who stutter especially have a high level of fear and anxiety when it comes to public speaking. That fear can present major challenges to reaching professional goals.

This webinar explored ways to confront and overcome the challenges that come with public speaking to reach our professional goals and attain the careers we are working towards. Derek Mitchell, Frank Stechel and a panel of professionals who stutter discussed how public speaking impacts one's career and shared personal stories about facing the fear of public speaking in the workplace.

**Facilitators: Derek Mitchell and Frank Stechel
Along with a Panel of Professionals Who Stutter**

Behind the Scenes - Chat Room Excerpt

Keith:	Thomas Jefferson stuttered.
Carl:	Keith - I didn't know that. There is a large list of famous/notable people throughout history who have stuttered!
Romelle:	Carl, I think this is a list of notable people in history who have stuttered: http://www.mnsu.edu/comdis/kuster/famous/famouspws.html
Carl:	Yes Romelle, great list! I think Samuel L. Jackson is my personal favorite.
Pamela:	This is great stuff!
Carl:	Greg - how did you luck out with getting stationed in Hawaii?!
Gregory:	Carl - It was all luck! I asked for Japan and South Korea but I'll take it.
Robert:	Hello Greg, this gives me a lot of hope. I'm in my backgrounds to become a police officer.
Carl:	Greg, that's awesome. How many of our leaders see the potential in us that we may not see in ourselves?
John:	Have you found a really good job? Wanna inspire others who stutter about your career success? Please do. We who stutter need to learn about your story. Submit your career success story here -- https://westutter.org/careersuccess/career-profile-submission
Joseph:	Hello, great presentation. My question for the panel is: What kind of speech therapy did you have in the past, and was it helpful or unhelpful? Thank you!
Carl:	Sage, thanks so much for sharing your perspective as a covert PWS. How many of us can relate to that?
Gregory:	That's powerful Sage!
Conor:	Last year I submitted a career success story. I serve as an elected official in my township. I serve as a Commissioner. I also own a little breakfast and lunch cafe. I guess I had to get over my fear fast – LOL.
Carl:	Conor - that's awesome. Sounds like a trial by fire! 😊

Behind the Scenes - Chat Room Excerpt

John:	Read Conor Quinn's career success story here — https://westutter.org/team/conor-quinn/
Douglas:	Question for the panel is: Has anyone joined Toastmasters and has it been beneficial? Would you recommend it?
Christopher:	Great to hear everyone's stories. So honored to be a part of the We Stutter at Work Committee.
Philip:	That is AWESOME.
J.	Beautiful story.
Gregory:	I'd recommend Toastmasters. Every time I have went, they were very supportive.
Carl:	Sage... Whoa, that's awesome. Shows just powerful the connections we form can be if we are open and authentic with others.
Kerri:	Very moving. I work in public relations and also find my stutter is more frequent when I am scripted. It's a delicate balance of being prepared but not too much!
Derek:	Doug - I joined Toastmasters in 2015 because I was a project manager and needed to improve my speaking skills. It's one of the best decisions I've made. In less than a year I overcame a lifelong fear of public speaking and got pretty good it.
Carl:	Douglas - I just joined my local Toastmaster's group. Personal opinion: it's a great environment for PWS. Everyone there has the same goal - to become a strong communicator and it is very supportive.
Kunal:	Sage - How do you handle the fear of judgement / accept yourself from a society that does not accept you as your true self in the Middle East?
Anabel:	Yea, Toastmasters is great. I joined in 2020 and I have seen an improvement with my public speaking skills.
Carl:	When I reached out to the head of my local Toastmaster's and told her I stuttered, she mentioned that she knew a district champion who stuttered (Russ Hicks)
Douglas:	Thanks to you all for Toastmasters recommendation.
Margie:	Everyone sharing is so impressive and eloquent on this webinar. Thanks for your honesty.
Javier:	I can echo the sentiment on Toastmasters...
Pamela:	I joined Toastmasters and earned my DTM in 2012.

Behind the Scenes - Chat Room Excerpt

Javier; Douglas:	Very nice Pamela; Congrats Pam.
Carl:	Kerri - Very true! I've found that my stutter seems to be the most prevalent whenever I practice too much. Finding a balance is key.
Conor:	I find stuttering to happen when I am most relaxed or high strong. It just happens. When I think too much it's ten times worse!
Sharon:	Question for the panel... I'm also a covert PWS in a role that requires "executive presence." Hearing your stories is very helpful, thank you. How do you prepare for a big speech or speaking moment? How do you manage the mental anxiety and the pressure you could put on yourself?
Carl:	Greg - So interesting you say that. A good friend once told me to "do one thing every day that scares you" - that helps me not to get complacent.
Pamela:	Sharon - I'm not on the panel but one thing I learned is that your audience wants you to succeed. They care about the info you're conveying not your stutter.
Derek:	Joseph - My last round of speech therapy was in 2013. It was very helpful but not as much for my speech. My speech therapist told me there is nothing wrong with stuttering and that I shouldn't try to be 100% fluent. That was the best thing anyone could've said to me. That day I made choice to accept my stutter and to have reasonable expectations for my speech.
Conor:	Powerful Gregory that's awesome! Prayer can be very helpful!!
Christopher:	Question for Sage and others who work closely with executives - How do you balance preparation versus being natural in a meeting? I'm always afraid that I'll sound like a robot if I prepare too much or that it'll back fire. My boss is EVP and his boss is Managing Director. As I get more exposure to my boss' boss, I'm more anxious of my stutter.
Andrew:	I am a scientist and I have to give presentations that require the use of precise language - i.e. word substitution can't be used very much. I have found that rehearsing ad nauseum helps me to gain fluency by 1) mastering the material and 2)

Behind the Scenes - Chat Room Excerpt

	overcoming my anxiety. Also, thanks for the Toastmasters recs! I'm going to join one near me if available.
Javier:	The great thing about Toastmasters - go to several chapters near you. You'll find the one that fits you. I visited a few before I committed to my current chapter.
Ciara:	What's Toastmaster?
Pamela:	Ciara - Toastmasters is a public speaking club in the U.S. and 80 other countries
Carl:	Ciara - Toastmaster's is an international organization devoted to public speaking: https://www.toastmasters.org
Breanne:	Thank you Ward. That hit home :)
Joseph:	Yes, I am also going to join Toastmasters with my company as well.
Carl:	Another nod to Toastmasters - It's helped me to decrease my use of filler words. Helping me to cut that out of my speech has made me a strong speaker, even though I still stutter.
Gregory:	Toastmasters is super helpful at breaking the ice and no one makes me speak if I don't want to.
Nakara:	Hello, this is so helpful for me, finally people who understand exactly what I'm going through on a daily basis.
Ashwath:	Yesterday I was thinking about how stammering is increasing in mind and what's was the process actually involving.
Anabel:	Yes and Toastmasters also helps with using pauses, prepare for speeches so you have more sense on where you have struggles or tension and make you learn to keep eye contact and give your message.
Ciara:	Thank you. Why is this good for stutters? Should we practice on there?
Anabel:	It gives you more opportunities to speak in different roles
Javier:	Ciara - "getting comfortable with being uncomfortable." And even if your intent is not for public speaking...it's about getting those reps in to let our voice be heard.
Ciara:	I see, I need help public speaking, thank you!

Behind the Scenes - Chat Room Excerpt

Anabel:	You also give more speeches which increases your confidence in speaking. I was very open about my stuttering from the first meeting, so the members were all understanding patient and I feel really comfortable giving speeches and receiving feedback.
Conor:	After speaking in front of group, isn't it amazing the feeling after? And hearing everyone being so happy for you and how understanding everyone is very rewarding!
Ciara:	Yes, it is!
Christopher:	Love that story!
Anabel:	Yes, I gave my speech for my Toastmasters club today and it was an amazing feeling.
Carl:	Joseph - I'm not on the panel but had speech therapy all throughout school. I met a speech therapist in my mid-20s who was transformational for me — she got me to focus on *what* I was doing while I stuttered. I didn't understand how I stuttered and that awareness was key to me becoming a more effective communicator, stutter or not.
Glenn:	My experience with Toastmasters has been very positive. My club is very supportive and provides me a safe environment to become more comfortable with stuttering in front of an audience.
Anabel:	Completely true Glenn!!
Christopher:	Your company might also have a local Toastmasters chapter
Nakia:	Carl - If you don't mind, what were you doing while you stuttered?
Carl:	Nakia - Lots of tension. Once during a block she had me stop/freeze and she held up a mirror for me... my neck was up in my ears and I realized that I carried so much tension in my body. A lot of our work was getting me to focus on stuttering easier, not necessarily stuttering less.
Ashwath:	What is the best way to start introducing about yourself with public?
Ciara:	Can anybody join Toastmasters?
Kunal; Anabel;	Yes; Yes, anyone can join Toastmasters, just go on toastmaster.org, find a local chapter and call the person provided.

Behind the Scenes - Chat Room Excerpt

Kerri:	For anyone questioning therapy - go for it! I recently started (for the first time at 34) and therapy is not focused on "fixing" my stutter but really acceptance, empowerment, and navigating it.
Brittany:	Same here Kerri! I'm 31. First time in therapy and it brought me here.
Anabel:	I had speech therapy from age 18 to 20years old and I was able to learn techniques that helped me when I struggled and had tension.
Gregory:	Having someone push you like that is terrifying but so rewarding
Joseph; Nakia	Thanks for sharing that, Derek!; Awesome story, Derek. :)
Abimbola:	Sometimes I worry that I would never be entrusted with leadership at work even though I'm technically competent. I look around my organization and several others where I've worked before and I'm not aware of any leader that stutters. Is this a real or perceived worry?
Kumal:	Sage - How do you get over the fear of judgement and fully accept yourself in a society that does not accept you given the culture there.
Ciara:	To be honest, I have never met anyone that has ever stuttered before.
Kerri:	Stuttering could be a huge a contributor of why you would make a fantastic leader! I "came out" as a stutterer a year into my job, after "proving myself" and it was so freeing.
C.	I agree with you Kerri and Brittany (about therapy). It's really helpful. A lot of internal work.
Carl:	Kerri, that is so true! I often think about all of the positive things about myself that I think stuttering has helped with: patience, understanding, empathy, kindness All traits that great leaders have! 😊
Kerri:	Yes, so so much internal. I had the shut the "stuttering gremlins" up. :)
Joseph:	Sage - How do you handle the fear of judgement / accept yourself from a society that does not accept you as your true self in the Middle East?

Behind the Scenes - Chat Room Excerpt

Derek:	To add to the topic of therapy, mental health was also a part of my journey. Toastmasters taught me how to feel more comfortable speaking in front of an audience, but focusing on mental health gave the residency to bounce back when the public speaking situations didn't go well.
Joseph:	Thanks Derek, this is such a great presentation and soooo important!
Carl:	A lot of great questions about stuttering / leadership. A good friend I made at my last company was openly autistic and a Senior Director. He was a champion for neurodiversity and always sharing content on LinkedIn related to autism and had a podcast focused on it as well. I've found it has worked well when we "lean in" to our differences.
Adam:	I have Asperger's also!!!!
Conor:	This has been such a great experience tonight. I really enjoyed hearing everyone speak tonight.
C.	Lean into our differences - Thanks for that, Carl. Powerful.
Fergie:	I agree with you Conor. Thank you so much to everyone who shared tonight.
Jihan:	Thanks for sharing. Has everyone experienced the similar problem that I have: My stutter is much worse when I have to speak on the phone than in-person communication. If I can avoid picking up the phone, I would definitely choose the alternatives, such as sending email, walking long way to coworker's office to talk. Now I tend to make phone calls when my office mate leaves his desk.
Christopher:	I have the same anxiety about the phone. I force myself to make calls in front of others and it is uncomfortable at first, but once you get going it definitely desensitizes the fear
Carl:	Abimbola - Also consider how much harder we people who stutter work to "compensate" for our stutter. We typically work harder and develop our skill sets. This makes us great employees and incredible leaders!
C.	Jian - I have definitely been there. Phone calls in a work setting are hard for me, especially when other people can overhear me. You're not alone in that.
Derek:	Jihan - I've had the same experience. I'm not sure why but it's easier for me to speak face to face than on the phone. For

Behind the Scenes - Chat Room Excerpt

	me I think it's something about being able to see a person's expression and get that non-verbal feedback.
Peter:	I sure do Jihan; One of my biggest fears and that I avoid at all cost.
Andrew:	Good points about leadership, Gregory. I think that people who stutter tend to be more empathetic which is a great leadership trait.
Carl:	Great perspective, Greg!
C.:	On the phone too, there can be pressure to fill the pauses. People don't know you're having a block, so it can add tension to get through it as fast as possible.
Anu; Carl:	Yes; The ayes have it!
Joseph:	What about company Zoom meetings? Is it easier or harder for PWS
Anu:	Exactly! They can wait for what I have to say.
Conor:	That's awesome Derek! I like that, "They can wait"
Gregory:	Well said Derek!
C.:	2Very helpful, Derek. My speech therapist really helped when she told me that everyone has the right to communicate. We have the right.
Robb:	I find Zoom meetings to be more difficult.
Adam:	There are many situations where people can't drop everything and wait :-)
Carl:	Yes! What we have to say is important, just like anyone else 
Anu:	"My stuttering is not an inconvenience to the world"
Conor:	I was told by a speech therapist once. "Stuttering is what makes you who you are, Be proud"
Adam:	Some are naturally impatient and we should realize that.
Ashwath:	My question is what is the best way to introduce yourself in public and how we gave to handle the situation?????????
Adam:	This session was THE BEST!
Breanne:	I love it too Anu! I wrote it down on my planner :)
Anu:	It's about me not them.
Gregory:	Slow is smooth and smooth is fast.
Anu:	I like that "smooth is fast"

Behind the Scenes - Chat Room Excerpt

Douglas:	Thanks to the panel for this informative discussion. I've gained a lot.
Adam:	How about terrible stuttering and friends you already have wonder why your stuttering so much more??!!
Carl:	Greg - I relate so much to when you said nobody wants it to be over more than me... we are always going to be our own biggest critics. I've learned to be kinder to myself. Brush a stuttering moment off and not dwell / sink too much in the feelings of shame and guilt that I used to get.
Anu:	Yes this is what happens to me. When I tell others I stutter I don't stutter.
Carl:	Pam made a good point in the chat earlier... our listener usually wants us to "win." They are on our side!
Micah:	I have found cold calls to be great practice for communicating on the phone.
Anu:	So this is what I do - I tell everyone let the whole world know I stutter. I am happy with that.
Kerri:	Self-disclosure increases fluency, in my experience, too.
Romelle:	Telling people upfront about being a person who stutters takes the pressure off of us and allow us to focus on the task at hand, rather than obsess with our stutter.
Kerri:	Thanks so much to all the panelists - this was fantastic!!!
Joseph:	How do you self-disclose to strangers? Self-disclose to co-workers?
Kim:	So many great ideas and conversations. Thank you for this experience and thank you to the panel.
Ashwath:	I'm from India
Harpreet:	Joseph - Just be up front that you stutter.
Carl:	Joseph - This is a previous webinar we did on stuttering: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nZ5KtPbptyI Title is Disclosure: When, How and Why
Glenn:	Great webinar! Very inspired by the panelists! And lots of great information gained in the chat.
Anu:	Yes whatever works for you.
Nakia:	Sage, thanks for sharing your story about that. It's a journey.
Conor:	For many years I've tried to hide the stuttering. Now I am trying to be as public about it as I can. My goal is to use my elected position to bring more awareness to it!

Behind the Scenes - Chat Room Excerpt

Kelly:	Thank you all for your honesty. This has been really inspiring.
Carl:	True. Stuttering, like life, is messy. Remember to be kind to yourself!
Joseph:	Wouldn't it be nice if Joe Biden as President bring real public awareness to stuttering!?
Glenn:	Conor - Wish you all the best with your goal!
Carl:	Brittany (and others) - we did a webinar last year on this exact topic! https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q7FeayK4RnU
Conor:	Thank you! Joe Biden is a true role model to all of us. And all of us on this zoom call are making a difference for all stutterers!!
Pamela; Carl; John:	We did a webinar on "When You Are The Interviewer"; It was facilitated by Pam and Haley, an H&R manager who stutters; Here's the link — https://youtu.be/Q7FeayK4RnU
Derek:	I agree Carl. Life doesn't always give us easy choices so we do the best we can with what we have.
Jihan:	Thank you everyone. This is my first webinar. I actually googled "stutter support group" this Monday after stuttering during a phone call. I was so frustrated and disappointed at myself. All of your sharing have been so powerful and helpful.
Gregory:	Great perspective Frank!
Carl:	I know John dropped some links earlier - check out our website, we have great resources including practice interviews, webinars, career profiles, and info for employers.
Andrew:	Brittany – You're in charge! Also, the interviewee's type of response to you if/when you stutter is potentially a reflection on their emotional intelligence and character.
Carl:	Good point, Brittany. I find that when I disclose it eases the tension in the room and "disarms" people.
Peter:	Thank you everyone; been in denial about my stutter and isolated for too long. This has been very inspiring and supportive.
Conor:	Brittany – You'll be great!!!

Behind the Scenes - Chat Room Excerpt	
Joe:	Thank you all for sharing the personal stories and advices. This is my first webinar as well and meeting other people who have the same challenge as I do. This is definitely an amazing experience. Thanks everyone.
Glenn:	Peter - I also let my stuttering keep me isolated for a long time. But trying to take steps and use support like this webinar to move forward.
Gregory; Abimbola; Ward:	Thank you Carmen!
Breanne:	I mentioned mine in my staff meeting the first time I met them. I work in the medical field and they are very accepting
Andrew:	On the contrary to most of what people are saying here, when I disclosed my stuttering to my boss in a previous job, I think it negatively affected me. I was a mild stutterer. I think disclosing at work isn't a yes/no proposal but depends on many factors - e.g. your degree of stuttering, type of work.
Kerri:	Really good point Andrew. It's not all rainbows. I still don't feel comfortable telling my partners I support at work.
Breanne; Anu; C.; Peter; Cyprian; Micah; Ashwath; Shawn; Robb; Harpreet; Abimbola; Joe; Gregory:	This was great! Thank you!; Thank you for the meaningful and pleasurable meeting!; Thank you so much panelists! Amazing evening; Thank you!; Excellent - so helpful and inspiring. I loved it!; Thank you all once again!' Thank you for inviting us Derek!; Amazing! Thank you.

Links:

- www.westutter.org/CareerSuccess
- <https://westutter.org/careersuccess/mock-interviews>
- <https://westutter.org/careersuccess/webinars>
- <https://westutter.org/careersuccess/profiles>
- <https://westutter.org/conference>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q7FeayK4RnU>