

NATIONAL STUTTERING ASSOCIATION

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



Tuesday, May 19, 2020

Webinar – Creating Allies in the Workplace

Being the only person who stutters in a workplace can feel isolating. We may try to cover it up and feel at risk of exposing ourselves if found out.

What if you intentionally disclose stuttering at work and cultivate allies? In this webinar, you'll learn strategies to build allies at work and with external colleagues. You'll also learn the benefits that come from being authentic and building strong relationships at work.

(Facilitators – Ariel Mahlmann and Carl Coffey)

Behind the Scenes - Chat Room Excerpt

(Typed Questions and Comments from Webinar Participants)

Pamela:	Hi everyone - it's nice to see some new faces. This promises to be a great webinar.
Adam:	I got lots of allies in the workplace!! I've got a great job in an office! Been there 20 years. Do I need this webinar!! I lost my job from Covid-19 but go back there June 2 nd . They know I stutter but they don't care.
Ariel:	There are always new things to learn! :)

Adam:	Ariel is my favorite character from little mermaid!!!!
Jonathan:	I'm on the Employment Committee and I work as a Community Employment Specialist.
Michèle	I had an amazing experience doing mock interview with Pam! It's really helpful :)
Jeremiah	I stutter quite a lot so I can't really hide it.
Pamela:	At my most recent job, most of my office mates knew I stutter. I didn't always share with upper management.
Zach:	In my clinical rotation earlier this year... I did not disclose my stutter. But obviously, they found out I stutter! Because I did not disclose my stutter, I felt more pressure to be fluent throughout the day and with coworkers and patients. Looking back, I should have disclosed. Would have taken much pressure off.
James:	Yes, No way to hide my stuttering or be covert (never an issue for me).
Jesse:	I work for Amazon in Seattle, and made it a point to introduce myself to the broader team (150 people) as a person who stutters, and extended the opportunity to chat about it if they had questions about it.
Wentrelle:	I disclosed at a staff meeting before I presented. It was very difficult and felt painful but I was very glad I did it. It showed me how often I try to hide my stuttering.
Soumya:	No, they don't. I'm worried it will affect their perception of my intelligence/other abilities. I've also worked with them for a while, so I don't know how to bring it up now since I didn't bring it up when I first introduced myself.
Emily:	The ones I work with the most know I stutter. But I have a large office so I do not work with a lot of them so other do not.
Venu:	Yes they know most of the time. Sometimes I hide when I meet people first time.
Sulema:	I've only disclosed to co-workers that I work with most often. I haven't told everyone because I feel like it's so personal to me. As my severity increases, my goal is move towards letting more people know.
Joseph:	Hi, everyone. Yes, my co-workers know that I stutter. My experience is that we make it a bigger deal than it really is but it is such a big deal to us. For the most part, my co-workers are patient with me and understanding.

Darren:	I'm a government regulator. I write permits and ensure that they are followed. Mainly it's just writing reports, but I do conduct inspections and hold permitting meetings and compliance assistance meetings. I've disclosed to my boss and my team, but I don't disclose when conducting inspections or meeting with permittees,
Andrea:	No, I have never disclosed it. But some people figured it out.
Douglas:	Yes, everyone I worked with knew I stuttered. More importantly they knew Doug was fluent when he was angry.
Jonathan:	My co-workers know almost immediately when I start talking so there's no way of hiding it. For most of my life I don't come out and say "I stutter" since it was a natural way I talk and for the most part people get used to the way I talk. Until recently, I've come out to people that I stutter. As for my feelings of incompetence, that is always my fear but as I grow older it becomes less an issue.
Joseph:	What is going to help me is to be an advocate for stuttering at work and spreading stuttering awareness & education. Basically, to disclose more and educate my co-workers about stuttering. I believe this will earn even more respect from my colleagues and upper management.
Jeremiah:	Someone who understands and is on your side.
Pamela:	Ally - someone who has my back if I am cut off or talked over, someone will say something to bring me back into the conversation.
Michelle:	Someone who I feel is on my side. Someone who will defend me, advocate for me.
Adam	Friend, companion, supporter!
Kate:	An ally is someone who is supportive of you who hasn't had the same lived experiences; they might not be someone who stutters.
Zach:	Someone who understands your speech without judgement. Gives you the time and patience that you need.
Jonathan:	An ally for me is someone who understands your strengths, weaknesses, abilities, talents and personality. They will stand up for you in times of distress.
Bobby:	Someone who will support you in your endeavors.
Trevor:	An ally should be someone who you could go to anytime without feeling pressured to speak perfectly.

Andrea:	I define an ally as someone with whom you have some type of relationship with. Basically someone who knows that you stutter and will support you.
Lawrence:	An ally is someone who accepts you as you are.
Lisa:	Ally is a person who I know is supportive and will stand up for me if anyone at work responds negatively to my stutter.
Darren:	An ally is someone who listens to what a self-advocate has to say and listens to their requests and stands up for them/shares their viewpoint with others.
Adam:	We're allies to each other!
Jesse:	An ally is anyone who supports you emotionally and situationally.
James:	Those who judge you based on your work abilities and competencies.
Joseph:	Someone who knows you well enough as a person and sees you for who you are and not just a person who stutters and who you have mutual respect for each other.
Douglas:	A person that does not hold my stuttering against me and gives me the opportunity to talk.
Darren:	I find it interesting that you all defined an ally in terms of stuttering, but I, who am also autistic and LGBT+, defined an ally in more general terms.
Emily:	Having your boss be an ally can be such an asset. I also work in an open office concept and there was a day I had to make some cold calls. Later that day my boss reminded me, I could go into an office to make my calls if it makes me for comfortable. It made me feel cared for that she offered an alternative to make me more comfortable.
Jesse:	Love that, Emily.
Ariel:	Love these responses, guys! Thank you for sharing :)
Pamela:	Darren - Thank you for sharing that. That is an important perspective. Much of what people that stutter do about "coming out" or disclosing comes from the pioneering work of the LGBTQ community.
Haley:	Great job y'all!
Douglas:	Darren - The NSA recognized the diversity of our stuttering community years ago and began including the Passing Twice organization at our annual conferences.
Darren:	I'm new to NSA and haven't attended a conference yet. This year was going to be my first one.

Carl:	There are plans to do a virtual conference this year... it'll be different, but still a way to be involved
Darren:	Since I'm autistic as well, does that mean that I'm passing thrice?
Pamela:	Great sense of humor, Darren.
Carl:	Passing thrice - I love it!
Douglas:	Yes, Darren!
Lawrence:	What is one action each of you will take as a result of what you learned today?
Adam:	I have Asperger's Syndrome--does that effect stuttering?
Andrea:	One action I will take because of what I learned today is to be more open about my stuttering to my colleagues/students (I'm a teacher).
April:	I do not stutter but work as an SLP and always looking for information regarding stuttering. I appreciate the presentation and comments made by others. Thank you for the great webinar. My action because of this conference is to make more of an effort of educating others about stuttering and NSA.
Wentrelle:	Has anyone ever disclosed before a presentation at work? If so what did/do you do to calm your nerves and refocus on your presentation? It took me a while to refocus. I felt unnerved afterwards.
Jesse:	Definitely have had poor allies, yes. There obviously isn't much you can do in the moment, but I took the opportunity as soon as I could after the situation was over to let them know what they did (often times it's inadvertent), and what a better action would be going forward in those instances.
Zach:	Ariel's question: I am a high school varsity assistant coach as well, and I thought the whole coaching staff were allies. However, one of them did make fun of my stutter in front of the whole staff and that was difficult. I felt ashamed and embarrassed. But I shouldn't have! A small percentage of the population might be rude about it. But the big percentage will not mind or judge! We are our worst critics.
Carl:	Thanks April - sounds like you are being a great ally! :-)
Jonathan:	I've disclosed at the interview.
Jesse:	Even your closest friends/family may not understand what the correct actions are. It doesn't make them a bad ally, necessarily, it just presents an opportunity to help them understand.

Emily:	To respond to the question if we thought we had an ally - I have been working with someone for a while and I thought by now he knew I stuttered. But once we talked about he said he thought I had Tourette's, and actually told people I had Tourette's. It hurt my feelings that he would assume something incorrect and tell other people. But instead of getting upset, I reminded him to just ask me next time. That most people are willing to talk about it rather than hearing an assumption.
Carl:	I think it's important to advocate for ourselves and let people know how/why their behavior can be interpreted. It feels good to stand up for ourselves.
Jonathan:	My disclosure depends on my daily stuttering severity...does that make sense? When I meet new people.
Kirby:	Great Job Ariel!
Carl:	I love the quote "those who mind don't matter and those who matter don't mind"
Jonathan:	Carl - Nice :)
Wentrelle:	Jonathan, does it take you a moment to gather yourself after doing so? If so what do you do to gather yourself and move forward in a confident way?
Darren:	I'm not sure if it's because of how it interacts with my autism, but my stuttering is more likely to block in the middle of a word or sentence than the traditional repeat a consonant at the beginning of a word. Even if autism/Asperger's doesn't interact with stuttering directly, they both effect your communication and therefore interact that way.
Zach:	I like that Carl!
Amanda:	I'm not a PWS, but I'm an SLP who works at a University. What I will take away today is how to teach my undergrad and graduate students how to be allies and how to encourage others to be allies as well.
Adam:	Thanks, Darren!
Carl:	Jesse - great point. People take their cues from us. We can let people know how to behave towards stuttering and set expectations.
Lawrence:	Being a person who Stutters does NOT define you!
Adam:	When people tell us "he or she is a stutterer" to others ... that seems a little rude.

Jesse:	Carl, I agree. I think life is about managing expectations (both your own and everyone else's) as best you can. Not everyone understands what we go through like we do. I've had to adjust my expectations with allies to allow for the fact that they are doing their best, and may not always do the correct thing. It's most likely not intentional and shouldn't take away from the fact they ARE still allies.
Jonathan:	I find I have to justify my difficulty in talking because in my mind my competency is being questioned by my stuttering. I move forward by telling them my stuttering doesn't stop but I use it as a tool to connect with others who experience difficulties.
Wentrelle:	Has anyone ever disclosed before a presentation at work? If so what did/do you do to calm your nerves and refocus on your presentation? It took me a while to refocus. I felt unnerved afterwards.
Michelle:	"Outing" someone else is a big boundary violation.
Emily:	I agree, Michelle.
Pamela:	Yes I felt it was way out of bounds.
Carl:	Pam - and I'm sure he may have thought he was doing you a favor/being a good person by it! Important why it's up to us to educate and advocate for ourselves... even when it may be scary to do.
Lawrence:	Great point. Joseph - I admire your courage!
Ariel:	I haven't personally disclosed during a presentation, but I know of people who have. It seems scary the first time, but the more you disclose and rehearse it, the easier it may get!
Emily:	Yes I try and do every presentation, especially to a new crowd. I include it in my "about me" section and make it organic or even make it a joke.
Bobby:	So many people only listen to how someone speaks and not what they are saying. They think that Fluency = Confidence. We all know that's not true. You can just do your best and be yourself, and that's always good enough. Everyone knows you stutter then, just do your best!
Adam:	Years ago, the phone rang. The man on the phone wanted to speak to me. My father told the man I stuttered and the man didn't want to speak to me. I was sort of mad at my father for telling the man I stuttered.

Jonathan:	I recommend using your stuttering as a tool to advocate and to use it for your benefit.
Jesse:	I think the nerves go away with time. I agree with Emily's approach above. Just try and make it more frequently, and own it.
Wentrelle:	Zach - Thank you. Good point. Emily - I will utilize that technique. Thanks for sharing.
Jonathan:	I read people's body language and non-verbal's when I talk with them. I can tell early on if they accept my stutter or not.
Pamela:	In relation to Chase's question, when we let someone take up so much headspace, we often react with negative self-talk. Change the mantra.
Michelle:	That's wise, Pamela:
Kate:	Disclosing near the beginning of a presentation or webinar when I introduce myself that I stutter does take a lot of the covert pressure off. I let the audience know I stutter and so they will probably hear some repetitions and elongations but to just bear with me and I'm happy to talk more about stuttering afterwards if they're interested in learning more. I find stopping and taking a breath from my stomach/diaphragm helps to get me out of a block, repetition, elongation or speaking too quickly. Telling a joke near the beginning of a presentation also helps me feel more at ease and connect with the audience more :)
Zach:	AND also, taking your time during a presentation. Take breathes, and understand that a long pause to you is probably a normal pause to others!
Adam:	Some folks are rude and not worth our time!
Zach:	I have for a capstone project before. I feel that one you disclose it, the pressure of being perfect and trying to be fluent
Lisa:	That's a great way to disclose. Thanks for sharing.
Ariel:	Thank you to everyone that participated! I'm sorry we couldn't get to all of your questions. Feel free to follow up with me and Carl if you'd like to continue the discussion! I'm on social media - Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn. Thanks again everyone!
Carl:	Thanks everyone for joining! If you pre-registered, you'll be alerted when it is posted.
Douglas:	Very good webinar Ariel and Carl. Thanks for doing this.
Michelle:	Excellent breadth and depth of content. Great balance. Thank you so much!
Emily:	Great job to everyone! thank you

Lisa:	Thank you for this webinar! Great content.
Adam:	Thanks gang!
Jesse:	Thanks for hosting!
Bobby:	Thanks everyone. Great webinar!
Ricky:	Thank you.
John:	Well done Carl and Ariel.

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