

NATIONAL STUTTERING ASSOCIATION

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



Sunday, July 26, 2020

Celebrating 30 Years of The ADA: A Stuttering Perspective

Many people who stutter have found protections through the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), but many are not aware of available workplace protections. The ADA was enacted 30 years ago to protect Americans with disabilities from educational and employment discrimination. The goal of the ADA is to ensure that persons with disabilities are afforded the same rights and opportunities as non-disabled individuals. This webinar celebrates the past 30 years of ADA accomplishments and shares helpful advice for how people who stutter are protected and how to access their rights in workplace situations.

Facilitators: Alvin Tarrell (Disability & Inclusion Leader at MITRE and PWS); Nina G (Disabilities Rights Activist and PWS); Pamela Mertz (Disability & Inclusion Advocate and PWS); Carl Coffey

(Healthcare Professional and PWS); and Jonah Otis (People Operations Leader at PayPal and PWS)

Behind the Scenes - Chat Room Excerpt	
Leslie:	Such an important point —Getting comfortable with the word disability
Luke:	Nina and Alvin mentioned being comedians. Actually I do find myself having a special sense of humor that can make people laugh. Interestingly English is my second language but my sense of humor is pretty much based on my observations of the English language and my way of playing around the language features. Can you talk about how you found your passion and instinct for humor? Is that a way to circumvent your speech difficulties?
Wendy:	I used the word disability at work to make sure I was treated with respect.
Pamela:	Amen, Leslie we have to be OK calling it as such.
Allison:	Question: What kind of accommodations can we ask for?
Wendy:	In order to "protect" myself at work, I had to remind my employer of my "disability," and I was not shy about it
Carlos:	I have a questions about job applications. When you submit your applications online and questions about disability come [up, do] you suggest people who stutter should select the option of “yes” disability?
Kunal:	Can anyone share any "reasonable accommodations" that have been made for people who stutter during the interview process?
Lisa:	I'd like someone else to be by me to explain why I stutter if someone gives me odd looks, because it's still not a guarantee that if I try to explain why I stutter WHILE stuttering they're going to sit and listen to me through and through, verses someone explaining it briefly [and] quickly.
Leslie:	Take a look at this site for job related accommodations: https://askjan.org/
Alvin:	I always mark "yes" for disability, in part to try to make sure it comes up in the interview. It never has though, but at least I feel good about being upfront about it!
Jennifer:	I usually say “No” because I don't always stutter so it’s hard to determine.

Lisa:	My level of stuttering counts as a disability since it severely impacts how I communicate with people, so I might as well check yes and get it over with, so they don't greet me and get surprised by stuttering nobody ever mentioned beforehand.
Wendy:	What happens if your boss says to you "you need to talk faster, you waste time"?
Carlos:	I am sure I have not been selected for jobs I have interviewed for because of my stuttering since it requires "great oral communication skills." Wendy - One new boss where I work told me once watch your, "Uhms, Uhms, Uhms" after telling on my first staff meeting that I am a person who stutters.
Wendy:	I reported my boss to HR as he made several comments to me. Employers need to be educated.
Luke:	Hi, Wendy - I hear you. I used to use visual charts to present my ideas to my boss but she didn't accept the way I communicated with her because she expected to be familiar with my own ideas though verbal speech. It was very frustrating!
Alvin:	Employers yes, but also co-workers. Several members of our chapter are treated very well by their employers, but not always by their co-workers. (Jealously, basically)
Wendy:	Yes, very frustrating especially when the behavior continues.
Lisa:	My method is honestly trying to explain politely first; then, if they still don't get it, "See ya!" I'm a flat out blatant person. If aren't willing to listen to me, you don't deserve my effort to work for you to my full extent. I'm 18, so I personally don't have a whole lot of experience with this.
Wendy	My co-workers were all very accepting and supportive.
Lisa:	Kind of hard to go and do that if it's a good paying job though. I do get that.
Haley:	A lot of people don't know how to react to someone who stutters. If you find a co-worker or employer isn't treating you as you wish, feel free to ask for a few minutes of their time and let them know how you wish to communicate with them, and how they should communicate with you- letting you finish your sentences, not completing your words, not rushing you, etc.
Wendy:	That doesn't work when your immediate boss is a bully. Has anyone ever filed a complaint with HR?

James:	Many, many people are very aware of ADA and keep discrimination covert.
Wendy:	I have since taken a package and an early retirement. However, it was brutal working for a bully.
Allison:	Would an employer openly admit that they didn't hire someone due to stuttering? They can just say that they chose another candidate without having to give the reason.
James:	They won't. It will make them liable.
Haley:	With the ADA in place, there are reasonable accommodations. If you feel that you are not receiving them, feel free to speak with HR. They will have you complete paperwork and get documentation from your physician verifying your condition and what accommodations are recommended.
Allison:	I agree.
Jennifer:	Right. They just don't call back.
Lisa:	New Jersey is hire and fire "at will" so sometimes will never know.
Carolina:	Sometimes they do slip up.
Lisa:	I've usually just gotten a sudden "someone else came up" the moment after I mentioned I stuttered. I think telling me they don't want me for my speech would hurt less than beating around the bush and playing pretend on why they suddenly instantly disqualified me.
James:	HR works for the company. They do NOT work for you. Also ADA only applies to companies with greater than 50 employees.
Lisa:	Do businesses get subsidies, either federal or state, when they hire a person who falls under ADA? Is there any incentive to hire?
Haley:	ADA is for 15+ employees. However, there's always other legislations in place that protect these situations. I love hearing about the D&I groups, Alvin and Jonah! Thanks for sharing!
Nina:	If you would like to share what we are talking about on Facebook, we are live streaming at: https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=3101259546653653
Allison:	I didn't realize either that stuttering was covered under the ADA.

Lisa:	People who happily take and send calls that also stutter genuinely confuse me. I get the classic "Are you there?" every time I stutter. Props to you for overcoming that, Carl.
Leslie:	So very true Carl and you shouldn't feel like you could lose your job as a result.
Haley:	Very well said, Carl!
Kenmon:	Great stuff Carl....Getting Comfortable, Being Uncomfortable!
Jonah:	Leaning into discomfort yields great results.
Nina:	https://www.huffpost.com/entry/everything-we-needed-to-know-about-stuttering-in-college_b_579e8c84e4b004301c51733f
Lisa:	Nina - You have the identical mindset that I do. I love it Do you ever poke fun at your stutter? I certainly do. My phone can skip music and I'll make the remark "Looks like it's skipping. Sounds like me." I like it because it also lets people know my stutter doesn't bother me either, despite being a little cynical. I only ever mock myself, of course. I would never do that to anybody else ever since I don't know their stance on it. My humor is just cynical.
Luke:	Pamela - Thank you for sharing about you being the silent one! I can very much relate to that. I used to work with a colleague on a project and I did a lot of background work. When two of us were at meetings with the boss, she talked and reported the progress to the boss. When two of us needed to improve the work based on boss' feedback, she would ask me how to do it and report it back to the boss on her own. Eventually she got more recognition, not me.
Allison:	Pamela, did the ADA protect you?
Kenmon; Carolina: Allison: James; Wendy; Haley; Nina; Hans:	Wow, thanks for sharing Pamela!; So hard Pam! Hugs!; I sense you rose like a phoenix!; The positive is that you found the NSA!; Yup and you're the one paying the attorney fees; That is great example, Pam. You got the satisfaction that they acknowledged their wrong doing...; Pam- I wonder what the outcome would be like if it were to happen today - 2006 vs. 2020? Has there been a change with how stuttering is viewed as a disability?; Thank you Pam for transforming this experience to systems change for all of us who stutter!; Wow, Pamela, you're a fighter.

Nina:	Lisa: I have been doing a lot of Zoom comedy shows, so when I do those, I say “Just so you know I do stutter AND your internet sucks, so it might be me and it might be you.” Can’t do that at my day job so I just disclose that I am on an internet phone call and to the phone or me might be delayed and feel free to ask me again if they didn’t hear something :)
Carl:	Haley Aguayo gave me some good perspective on this. When scheduling a phone interview with a recruiter/hiring manager (usually by email) maybe respond with something like - “I’m excited to speak with you! Can I request that we schedule a few extra minutes?”
Allison:	I never thought of that Pam. What if they don’t permit just an in-person interview?
Jennifer:	Yeah, sometimes they don't let you and you have to do the phone interview. It doesn't hurt to try.
Carl:	And then you can go into a disclosure and share about your stuttering.
Leslie:	What advice would the panel give to a student with an invisible or visible disability on the issue of disclosure to receive accommodations? For most schools, students must report to an Office of Disability Services who confirms that there is a disability. Some students feel that they are “cheating” the system or that they want to get through college or graduate school without the crutch of an accommodation.
James:	For a student: state exactly what you want. You’re not cheating the system. I’m a Physician and had to take Oral boards... I asked for extra time to remove the time pressure. I did not need it in retrospect but having the extra time was huge.
Carl:	https://westutter.org/careersuccess/mock-interviews/
Allison:	Good idea for asking for more time for the phone interview if you cannot get out of the phone interview.
Carl:	James - that’s awesome. My Dad used to tell me all the time that until you ask for something, the answer will always be no.
James:	I had to learn the hard way.
Carl:	James, it happens that way sometimes. We all get there at different points.
Lisa:	What questions did you guys get applying for a job upon knowing you stutter? More for my own personal preparation,

	may it be nasty or genuinely curious about my stutter. I know it won.
Carl:	Lisa - Mostly questions on my ability to do the job, especially something that it requires a lot of speaking. I then use that as an opportunity to “brag” on myself. I can let folks know all that I’ve been able to accomplish. As a person who stutters - I get to talk about overcoming adversity, humility, and drive. All very important to HR managers/hiring managers.
Allison:	I wish I had known about audible books in college
Leslie:	Great app that converts any reading material to audio — Speechify! It’s awesome!
Pamela:	Thank you, Leslie! I didn’t know about the Speechify app.
Haley:	Employers are not allowed to ask you about your disabilities even if it is obvious, in an interview. You can stutter on every sound and every word, and they are not able to ask about it. They can only legally talk about it if you bring it up first. Therefore, it’s on your best interest to mention it and talk about how you can still achieve the job requirements, or examples of your past achievements relating to the job requirements. From there, a discussion can begin with them asking “How do you feel about XYZ”? Otherwise, you’re letting them make assumptions about your abilities.
Jonah:	On Haley’s point above. If you don’t disclose, they get to make assumptions.
Lisa:	I'm 18 and have practically zero work experience, school and a job was too much to handle at once at a 5 am – 4 pm day. I don't have a lot of experience to even mention to brag about, unfortunately. It might be pretty interesting trying to come up with something the first few times since I haven't established myself like that yet.
Fatima:	Pamela, you are a great example and support.
Carlos:	Question about ADA: Just recently I was in an interview process with a big philanthropy organization. I disclosed during the process for the first time that I am a person who stutters. I just found out that I am not longer in the process. I asked for feedback about my interview. Under ADA can they say my stutter is one of the reasons I can’t continue in the process?

Haley:	Carlos - They will never admit if it's the reason; It'll only open lawsuits. Just like they can't say, we didn't hire you because you're female, or Hispanic, or 60 years old.
James:	Carlos - Don't think they will tell you it's because of your disability because that is overt discrimination. But if they tell you there are candidates with more experience...
Lisa:	I'll announce myself of course, but when it comes to the points I should say to strengthen my case that it's just my speech, I lack in it. Any ideas?
Wendy:	Lisa - Always play up your strengths. Lead with that.
Jonah:	Young disabled people should take a look at Disability: IN's Next Gen program for young aspiring professionals and college students: https://disabilityin.org/what-we-do/nextgen-leaders-initiatives/
James:	Can I ask my boss if I want to work onsite because working from home seems to be associated with more stuttering?
Lisa:	One thing I noticed about wearing a mask that's oddly nice is that it covers the stress and spasms from hard stuttering. Weird perk but I'll take it. I usually tend to cover my mouth with my hand during blocking, now I don't need to! I think it's worth hiding my blocks despite the mask making my glasses as foggy as a sauna by breathing.
Carl:	Lisa - Same. I was ordering from a deli the other day and noticed I was blocking and the person had no idea what was going on. I viewed the good and the bad in that situation. I've
Carl:	I've heard people give the advice of turning off your own camera (if you're having video conferences) so that you don't have to watch yourself and potentially get distracted.
Carl:	Joseph - That's always been a fear of mine, even though I love people. I think I'd be a great "people manager" but the pressure of people reporting to me is a fear that I still have, even though I am more comfortable with disclosing my stuttering than I ever was.
James:	Joseph - Other people have found that you're a "good employee" it only makes sense for them to make you lead.
Alvin:	Good words, thanks for sharing Joseph! It's a journey for each of us (and all of us), and you're right that sometimes we are our own worst enemies! Each stage of life brings its own "fears" and worries - those fears just mean we're growing

Lisa:	School wasn't too great for me either and I finally graduated. You can find it in yourself to do the same no problem.
Carl; Jennifer: Cheryl:	Such great perspective, Pamela. Thanks for sharing!; Good to hear Pamela! The job interviewing process especially is very tough!; Thank you for sharing Pamela!!
Carl:	It's also difficult because stuttering can be situational and vary from day to day. I have to remind myself that some days will be tougher than others, but I am still strong. And as long as I'm still here, I know that I can do difficult things. And make an effort every day. I also try to take the pressure off of myself. Some days I'll struggle on some words. And that is okay. My stuttering on a given day doesn't make me any less of a person.
James:	It can be discrimination if your workplace lays off specific people.
Carl:	And to Joseph's point earlier - I keep an archive folder at work of "good" emails. Things that I can refer back to when I'm having a tough day. People thanking me for my contributions. Telling me how they value me as a co-worker. That really helps a lot when I need a pick me up.
Jennifer; Allison; :	Carl - I am also very hard on myself some days. It good to be reminded about the self-care.; Great idea, Carl
Carl:	I get the "imposter syndrome" often and I have to remind myself that I deserve to be there and I have value.
James:	I got a lot of useful points for Zoom meetings. I find Zoom lot more stressful than in person.
Lisa; James; Cheryl; Leslie: Wendy; Pamela: Bobby; Tracy; Joseph; Rossanna:	Thank you, all!; Awesome thanks a lot for doing this; This has been so wonderful! Thank you all for your sharing and insight; Thank you for wonderful insight and information; This has been amazing! Thank you for the information and everyone's stories; Great job all! Thank you!

Links:

www.adaanniversary.org/findings_purpose

www.westutter.org/CareerSuccess

Job Accommodation Network: <https://askjan.org/>