



# Adult Chapters

## **MEETING TOPICS**

### **OVERVIEW**

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The National Stuttering Association (NSA) is driven to improve the employment opportunities of people who stutter. The We Stutter @ Work initiative from the NSA seeks to eliminate the many workplace stigmas to improve employment outcomes for people who stutter. Through a series of programs, the NSA is informing, inspiring and equipping people who stutter to improve their workplace opportunities.

The following Meeting Topics contain conversation starters and role-playing activities to help people who stutter succeed in getting a job and exceling within their career.

To learn more about the We Stutter @ Work initiative, visit [www.WeStutter.org/CareerSuccess](http://www.WeStutter.org/CareerSuccess).

### **MEETING TOPICS**

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## MEETING TOPIC

# Jobs and Careers for People Who Stutter

## SITUATION

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People who stutter (PWS) understand the difficulties of searching and applying for jobs, whether it's in person or online. So many thoughts race through our mind when PWS search and apply for jobs. These thoughts include: *I hope this job doesn't involve too much talking. Will my stuttering help or hinder me during the job interview? If I get the job, how will my co-workers react to my stuttering?*

Effective verbal communication skills is usually a key requirement listed in job descriptions. It is important for PWS to think about and evaluate how one feels about their stutter and if their stutter plays a role in all of the requirements listed in the job description.

## PURPOSE

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Not every PWS thinks about if and/or how their stutter effects the type of jobs they are searching and/or applying to. This meeting topic should spark meaningful conversations about if and/or how their stutter effects the type of jobs that are searching and/or applying.

## ACTIVITY

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### The "Guess Who" Game

*This activity will explore thoughts on how stuttering may effect one's ability to perform a job.*

Hand out post-it notes and pens to each attendee. Have each person write down a job title (whether it be their own job, a job they are applying for, or a dream job) and place it in a hat or a small box. Each person will draw a post-it note from the box and WITHOUT LOOKING at the sticky note, place it on their forehead.

Have one person stand up or stand in the center of a circle surrounded by other attendees. The person standing will ask questions related to how much stuttering effects this particular job title. The goal is for the person standing to ask enough questions in order to correctly guess the job title that's stuck on their forehead.

Continue this activity until every person has had an opportunity to guess the job title on their forehead. (Larger groups may need to break into smaller groups.)

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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- What were some key takeaways learned about each job discussed and if/and or how stuttering relates to one's ability to perform the job?
- When reviewing job descriptions, what are some listed requirements and job responsibilities that cause PWS to doubt themselves?
- Has someone talked themselves out of applying for a job or going into a career field because of their stutter. If so, what was the job/career?
- If stuttering were a non-issue, would you be in the job/career you are in today?

# MEETING TOPIC

## *Job Interviewing Skills*



### SITUATION

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One of the most challenging experiences people who stutter (PWS) face is interviewing for a job. Effective verbal communication skills are on full display when interviewing for a job. It is a test of confidence and determination whether done over the telephone, in-person or through online video. This is a stressful situation for anyone, but it can be more stressful for a PWS.

### PURPOSE

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The mastery of job interviewing takes practice. One must practice building confidence about expressing their abilities and capabilities for the job. The ability to confidently and effectively communicate one's skills and abilities is a hallmark of a successful job interview.

This meeting topic should spark meaningful conversations on what confident and effective job interview techniques are for PWS through role-play activity and group discussion.

### ACTIVITY

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#### **Job Interview Role-Play**

Divide meeting attendees into groups of two, making one person the "Interviewee" and the other person the "Hiring Manager." Have the Interviewee and the Hiring Manager sit across from each other. The Hiring Manager will ask the following four questions to the Interviewee. After doing one interview, reverse roles and do another interview.

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. What's one accomplishment, job or school-related, that you are proud of achieving?
3. Talk about a time when you have failed in doing something? How are you different because of that experience?
4. Where do you see yourself in 5 years?

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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- What were some initial feelings about the interview experience?
- What are some ways a PWS can overcome nervousness and stress during a job interview?
- Who disclosed or talked about their stutter in the interview? How did it feel?
- Was anyone uncomfortable talking about their stutter? If so, why?
- Has anyone in a real job interview talked about their stutter? If so, how did you bring it up? How did the interviewee respond?
- What are pros and cons to disclosing your stutter throughout the job search process?
- What are some thoughts an interviewee/employer can have about hiring a PWS?
- How can a PWS minimize any concerns an interviewee/employer may have in hiring someone who stutters?



## MEETING TOPIC

# Overcoming Self-Stigma to Achieve Career Goals

## SITUATION

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The general public holds certain beliefs about people who stutter based solely on their disfluency. Research studies tell us the stigma is real. The public believes people who stutter are: non-assertive, unsociable, insecure, nervous, tense, shy, anxious, and afraid.

This stigma extends beyond character traits to beliefs at how capable a PWS is on the job. Research studies indicate people who stutter are viewed in the workplace as being less intelligent, less educated and less competent.

These stereotypes are damaging personally and professionally to people who stutter.

But, just as damaging is the self-stigma that affects many people who stutter. Self-stigma is all that negative self-talk that happens when people who stutter believe those stereotypes and attach them to themselves. When PWS accept these negative stereotypes to be true, they can feel unworthy and possibly prevent a PWS from doing things, including jobs, that require lots of talking.

## PURPOSE

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Everyone who stutters must confront both the public stigma and the self-stigma that exists. While a person who stutters cannot fully control the public stigma he or she will face, they can attempt to overcome self-sabotaging behavior that's a result from falling victim to self-stigma issues. This meeting will bring up deep rooted emotions and hopefully, motivate people who stutter to feel worthy and capable of achieving their career goals.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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- Has anyone experienced being discriminated against because of your stutter? If so, what was the situation? How did it make you feel? What, if anything, did you do to move past that negative experience?
- Do you agree or disagree with this statement: Self-doubt erodes self-confidence. Explain why or why not.
- Are there any jobs where a person's disfluency should disqualify them from doing the job?
- What was your dream job as a child? What's your dream job today? (Discuss how fluency plays a role in those dream jobs.)

## ACTIVITY

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Give each attendee a notecard (or a blank piece of paper) and a pen. Have attendees write down 3 things they are proud of accomplishing personally and/or career-wise. Go around the room and have people share what they wrote. Ask follow-up questions to learn how stuttering impacted a person's ability to achieve their accomplishments. (In people's answers, notice if they were able to overcome negative self-talk issues to achieve what they did. If so, discuss it.)

Next, have attendees turn over their notecard (or piece of paper) and write down one thing they are going to challenge themselves to do to either get their dream job or to further excel in their current job.

## MEETING TOPIC

# Delivering Successful Presentations



## SITUATION

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People who stutter understand the difficulties of speaking in front of groups, small and large. Presenting at work can be particularly stressful because we often have that inner chatter that tells us we aren't good enough, people will judge us and we will not be understood.

Presentations at work can take many forms. You may be asked to make an impromptu update about the project you've been working on during a staff meeting. You may be asked to deliver a report on sales figures and goals during a weekly or monthly conference call. You may also be asked to plan and deliver an in-service training session on a trending topic in the workplace.

Whatever the format, with advance notice or not, we have to be ready. We cannot let our stuttering, our fear of stuttering, nor listener reactions to how we speak hold us back from making presentations at work.

## PURPOSE

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This meeting topic should spark helpful conversation about the emotions we feel when giving presentations and how best to prepare for most any type of speaking opportunity at work.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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Introduce the topic of *Delivering Successful Presentations* and then ask the following discussion questions:

1. Who here has presented recently at work or anywhere for that matter? How did it go?
2. For those who have given a recent presentation, did you advertise your stuttering before speaking? If so, what did you say? How did you feel? If not, why not?
3. List as many types of "presentations" people give at work? ("Presentations" go beyond the expected to the unexpected ranging from introducing yourself on a conference call to one-on-one conversations with your boss to almost any speaking situation.)
4. What type of feedback have you received after giving a work presentation?
5. How do you prepare for planned speaking events?
6. What are some of the things you worry about before, during and after a speaking event?
7. What are some ways you help to ease your stress/anxiety before giving a presentation



## ACTIVITY

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### Practice Impromptu Speaking

Ask for a few volunteers to respond in 1-2 minutes to one of the following questions. (Tip: have someone use the timer function on their phone to keep the speaker on time.)

1. Talk about a recent movie you saw and why did you like it or hate it?
2. If money were no object, where would you go for a two-month vacation and why?
3. Tell us about the last fun activity you did just for yourself? What did you like best?
4. Share an exotic recipe you tried cooking at home? How did it turn out?
5. Talk about a podcast you recently listened to. What was the main point of the episode?

## FURTHER ADVICE

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*Either share the following in you meeting or share with the group in a post-meeting email.*

Most people who stutter dread the experience of public speaking and presentations because they are self-focused. We worry about what to say, how it sounds, how the listeners will react and what we will look like standing up in front of a small or big group if we stutter or block a lot. It's important to remember the presentation is not about you. It's about your listener and the information they need to know.

### Successful Presentation Tips

1. Know your material.
2. Practice often by rehearsing your material yourself a few times at home, in the office by yourself or with a trusted colleague.
3. Be so confident in your material that you don't need notes or need to read line-by-line from your presentation slides.
4. Most presentations have a similar framework: clear introduction, main point and conclusion.
5. Be yourself. Be conversational. Have fun.
6. Volunteer for speaking opportunities at work so you can gain greater confidence in your abilities to present.
7. Consider attending a Toastmasters group or take a continuing education class on giving presentations.
8. Use the following proven Effective Communication Skills
  - Listen and respond to questions in real time.
  - Use vocal variety – vary voice volume and pitch.
  - Stay concise and to the point – don't ramble.
  - Don't use million dollar words just to be impressive.
  - Use body language – eye contact, gestures, moving around, sitting down, standing up.
  - Consider props if you want to really illustrate a point.
  - Test technology ahead of time – always be prepared for a plan B.
  - The rule of threes: tell them what you'll say, say it, and then say it again (summarize).
  - Be mindful of time – if you have 15 minutes, prepare 12 minutes of material.
  - Go with the flow.