

STUTTERING *in the* WORK PLACE

Last month we touched upon strategies and tactics for job interviews. However, what happens when you actually GET the job?

This month we are following up for how stuttering is portrayed in the workplace. We report on the results of two studies that interviewed people who stutter (PWS) and commentary from PWS.

Many of us are haunted by sticky stuttering situations at work—whether it is avoiding going to the lunchroom or playing a recording to answer the phone or leaving a message. Avoidance behaviours at work fuelled by fear of stuttering is a reality for many people who stutter (PWS). According to a study by [Bricker-Katz et al. \(2013\)](#), the belief that stuttering is not OK in the workplace is pervasive among PWS. Expectation of a negative evaluation by others fuels this self-stigma and subsequent self-doubt and self-esteem. [Another study](#) found that some PWS are less willing to take a promotion due to their stuttering.

RESEARCH

What is important to note about these findings is that they are based on interviews from PWS and thus reflect the beliefs of people who stutter—not beliefs about people who stutter. Therefore, this appears to be a self-stigma as opposed to a stigma of those we work with.

Other research that uses less subjective data supports this point. Data from a [longitudinal study](#) that follows the educational outcomes of a representative sample of people (i.e., 1% of the study's sample did stutter, the same rate as in the natural population) found no significant evidence to show that effects of stuttering influenced educational outcome, and not enough evidence to support that stuttering negatively impacts employment.

In fact, some workforces are so proactive about stuttering that they create jobs specifically tailored for PWS, such as [the case with Dariel Martin](#), who concluded after a long process of job interviews that there is room for stutterers in the workplace.

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So, maybe we can work toward changing how we think and react to stuttering by practicing new habits of thought.

You are a valuable employee as a PWS. In addition to possessing unique gifts and talents that come with being human, PWS know the value of preparation for meetings and presentations, have excellent written and listening skills, and can generally increase the importance of communication in the office, as outlined by [The British Stammering Association](#).

To help make room for stuttering in your workplace, take accommodations that you would find helpful. As mentioned by Jean-François Ferry in a [previous CSA commentary](#), these might include obtaining time to attend speech therapy or a more private workspace to take phone calls. Even a simple conversation can help to take the edge off.

What do you think? Is stigma truly self-generated, or do PWS have a harder and less successful time than others? Weigh in on the matter by emailing csa.newsletterinbox@gmail.com.

the ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE



Some habits slip out of our conscious awareness. For most people who stutter, a common example of a subconsciously engrained habit is muscle tension. This month we are taking a closer look at a speech therapy technique: the Alexander Technique, which aims to address stuttering at the subconscious level by releasing this muscle tension.

Through a series of exposure therapy (e.g., making phone calls, speaking with someone) the Alexander Technique addresses what our bodies do automatically at moments of what we perceive to be ‘high stress’. Actual speech production itself is not the subject of this therapy. Because the Alexander Technique gets to the root of stuttering—i.e., subconsciously held muscle tension—it is thought to have relatively long-lasting effects, according to The British Stammering Association.

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“Old habits die hard” is a colloquialism we are all familiar with. While engrained behaviour such as muscle tension can be difficult to change, it is not impossible. The next step of the Alexander Technique is persistence: weaving the monitoring of bodily tension into everyday life and keeping at it.

The Alexander Technique differs from others because it does not involve changing speech production or how sounds are produced, but rather employs a holistic approach at treating the person by getting to the subconsciously held muscle tension. Employing mindfulness practices, such as taking note of the automatic responses to speaking stimuli, helps to de-program the body.

During a lesson, one experiences the personalized instruction of a certified Alexander Technique teacher guiding one through a series of activities like lying down, standing, speaking, or walking. Students become empowered and independent by receiving guidance from their instructor so they can practice at their own time. This technique can provide lasting change, and understandably is not a quick fix. Find out more about Canada’s Alexander Technique scene here. Bonus: The Alexander Technique generally improves posture, awareness, and movement!

Stuttering treatment is a not a one-size-fits-all—there are as many approaches to treating stuttering as there are types of stuttering itself. We’d like to hear from YOU: What techniques have worked for you, or not? csa.newsletterinbox@gmail.com

‘Would you be more confident if you didn’t stutter?’

On a stuttering community blog this week I read a post about a question I have asked myself many times:

‘Would you be more confident if you didn’t stutter?’

While reading the responses I found a variety of answers... In turn, I pose this question to you. Take a moment this week to reflect if your stutter is restricting you from being the person you want to be. And if it is, should you let it?

If your answer to the question is ‘yes’ then I encourage you push past the limits you believe your stutter has set and allow the opportunity for you to reach your full potential. I try to remind myself that I may have a stutter, but it does not define who I am. I challenge you to display confidence this month and to not only accept who you are, but to revel in it.

Feedback? Comments? We’d love to hear it.

Email csa.newsletterinbox@gmail.com.



Meet Jen Hart

It was a typical morning in the bustling streets of downtown Toronto. I had yet to speak to anyone outside of my home that day. With every step to work, I thought about my initial “listener” who lurked just a few blocks away: an anonymous coffee barista at Tim Hortons.

When I arrived at the coffee shop, I stood outside for a minute to warm up my diaphragm. One hand cupped my stomach as I took a few slow and deep breaths. Then, I stepped inside and I took my place in line.

...Four people before me: I ran my order, “Double-Double”, continuously in my head.

...Three people before me: I stretched my mouth, my tongue, my jaw.

...Two people before me: I whispered the words “Double-Double” over and over to myself.

...Next in line: I envisioned ordering that “Double-Double”.

...My turn: I inhaled deeply as I began to speak, “Can I have a D—”

My tongue froze...My throat closed...My jaw locked...My shoulders stiffened...My chest ached...And then finally, my entire body filled with shame....

To read the rest of Jen’s gripping story and how she handled the situation, [click here](#). Jen also shares some affirmations that can help ebb the flow of anxiety during sticky situations like these.

We urge you to send us your questions, comments or conversation topics and we will anonymously post your question with our response. Although our responses will only be based on our own personal experiences and opinions, we hope that this will spark conversation, provide some insight to those tough questions, and maybe bring some humor! We look forward to hearing from you and thank you in advance!

Please send your questions, comments or conversation topics to csa.newsletterinbox@gmail.com.

CSA Newsletter

This newsletter is published monthly by volunteers of the Canadian Stuttering Association, Christina Spicer and Julia Palozzi. To contact the newsletter editors: csa.newsletterinbox@gmail.com.



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